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Preface to Introduction to Sociology 2e

About OpenStax

OpenStax is a non-profit organization committed to improving student access to quality learning materials. Our free textbooks are developed and peer-reviewed by educators to ensure they are readable, accurate, and meet the scope and sequence requirements of modern college courses. Unlike traditional textbooks, OpenStax resources live online and are owned by the community of educators using them. Through our partnerships with companies and foundations committed to reducing costs for students, OpenStax is working to improve access to higher education for all. OpenStax is an initiative of Rice University and is made possible through the generous support of several philanthropic foundations.

About This Book

Welcome to *Introduction to Sociology 5e*, an OpenStax resource created with several goals in mind: accessibility, affordability, customization, and student engagement—all while encouraging learners toward high levels of learning. Instructors and students alike will find that this textbook offers a strong foundation in sociology.

In order to better fit the diverse student body of urban schools, such as The City University of New York (CUNY), this version is the one edited by Hirosuke Hyodo, Ph.D. The license type remains to be CC-BY 4.0, the most accommodating one.

To broaden access and encourage community curation, *Introduction to Sociology 5e* is “open source” licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) license. Everyone is invited to submit examples, emerging research, and other feedback to enhance and strengthen the material and keep it current and relevant for today’s students. You can make suggestions by contacting Hiro Hyodo, hhyodo@bmcc.cuny.edu.

To the Student

This book is written for you and is based on the teaching and research experience of numerous sociologists. In today's global socially networked world, the topic of sociology is more relevant than ever before. We hope that through this book, you will learn how simple, everyday human actions and interactions can change the world. In this book, you will find applications of sociology concepts that are relevant, current, and balanced.

To the Instructor

This text is intended for a one-semester introductory course. Since current events influence our social perspectives and the field of sociology in general, OpenStax encourages instructors to keep this book fresh by sending in your up-to-date examples to hhyodo@bmcc.cuny.edu so that students and instructors around the country can relate and engage in fruitful discussions.

General Approach

Introduction to Sociology 5e adheres to the scope and sequence of a typical introductory sociology course. In addition to comprehensive coverage of core concepts, foundational scholars, and emerging theories we have incorporated section reviews with engaging questions, discussions that help students apply the sociological imagination, and features that draw learners into the discipline in meaningful ways. Although this text can be modified and reorganized to suit your needs, the standard version is organized so that topics are introduced conceptually, with relevant, everyday experiences.

Features of OpenStax Introduction to Sociology 3e

Modularity

This textbook is organized on Connexions (<http://cnx.org>) as a collection of modules that can be rearranged and modified to suit the needs of a particular professor or class. That being said, modules often contain references to content in other modules, as most topics in sociology cannot be discussed in isolation.

Section Summaries

Section summaries distill the information in each section for both students and instructors down to key, concise points addressed in the section.

Further Research

This feature helps students further explore the section topic and offers related research topics that could be explored.

Acknowledgements

Introduction to Sociology 5e is based on the work of numerous professors, writers, editors, and reviewers who are able to bring topics to students in the most engaging way.

We would like to thank all those listed below as well as many others who have contributed their time and energy to review and provide feedback on the manuscript. Especially Clint Lalonde and team at BC Campus for sharing the updates they made for use in this edition, and the team at Stark State College for their editorial support in this update. Their input has been critical in maintaining the pedagogical integrity and accuracy of the text.

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Supplements

Accompanying the main text is an [Instructor's PowerPoint](#) file, which includes all of the images and captions found throughout the text and an Instructor's test bank.

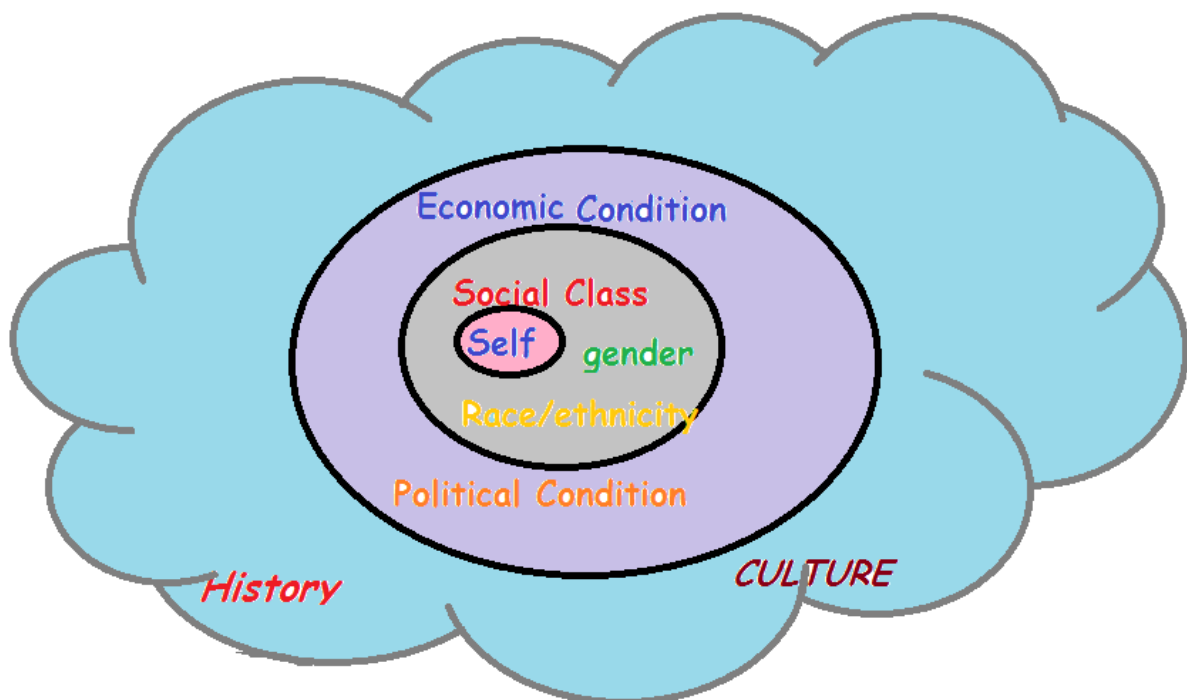
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Introduction to Sociology

class="introduction"

Sociologists study how society shapes what we do and how we think, through several important elements, as shown above.



Social Conditions and Social Locations

We all belong to societies, whose size can be as small as a family or as large as a country. Societies vary not just in size but, to be noted, in social conditions in several important ways. They are attached to the society as a whole on the macro level, including economic conditions, political conditions, historical (cultural) conditions, and so on. Such **social conditions** are assumed to shape people's behaviors (or what they do) and attitudes (how they think). For example, those who grew up in democratic environments tend to be more democratic than those who grew up in feudalistic environments. Until the latter half of the nineteenth century, indeed, many Americans supported even slavery. Does anyone of us support it today? No, none of us does; we were born and grew up in way more democratic political conditions.

Not just political conditions, but also think about economic conditions and historical (cultural) conditions, as well, in connection to people's behaviors and attitudes. In such a diverse society as the U.S., for example, people come from different cultures and, thus, act and think in different ways. American sociologist Herbert Gans, indeed, observes differences even between parents (foreign-born) and their own children (native-born). According to him, "Neither will [the native-born children] be willing--or even able--to take low-wage, long-hour "immigrant" jobs, as their parents did (Gans 1992, p. 173). The parents maintain their original cultural conditions while their children tend to be inclined more to the American cultural conditions. Although they share the same DNA, hence, they differ in their behaviors and attitudes.

In addition to social conditions, we all have our own social locations that are attached to each one of us. They include, but are not limited to, social class, race/ethnicity, gender, and, as just shown above, immigrant status. They are also assumed to shape our behaviors and attitudes. Smoking, for example, is a behavior determined by some social locations, such as social class. In the past, smoking was a normative behavior, not associated with social class (Washington Post 2015, Jan. 14). But once the health risks of smoking became widely-known, the better-off began kicking the habit way more successfully than lower-class people. Today, it's considered a class-related behavior. Just like social conditions, hence, **social locations** are also important sociological tools for analyzing people's behaviors and attitudes.

To sum up, it is the social environments (i.e., social conditions and locations) that shape our behaviors and attitudes, and sociologists dismiss any explanations about human behaviors/attitudes based on DNA, instincts, psychic power, or willpower.

"I think therefore I am"? Very good, but don't say that in your sociology class, okay? Why? That's because in this statement, there's no room for social conditions or locations to be taken into account.

What Is Sociology?

- Explain concepts central to sociology
- Understand how different sociological perspectives have developed

Sociology, Society, Culture, and Sociological Imagination



Photo Courtesy pxhere.com < <https://pxhere.com/en/photo/329588> >.

Sociology is the scientific study of what people do (behaviors) and how they think (attitudes) referring to their *social conditions* and *social locations*.

"Social conditions" vary, as aforementioned, in their types and directions, be they politically democratic or feudalistic, economically rich or poor, socially integrated or segregated, and so forth. "Social locations" include social class (i.e., a combined variable of education, occupation, and income), race/ethnicity, gender, and so forth. Sociologists assume, hence, that such social conditions and locations, or to say "the society," shape our behaviors and attitudes.

Society is an entity that shapes how its members interact with one another with consistently structured sets of rules, be they formal (legal laws) or informal (cultural norms).

Sociologists study all aspects and levels of interactions. The **micro-level** sociology studies social interactions between individuals taking place in

everyday situations, while the **macro-level** sociology looks at trends among, and between, large institutions, be they business, educational, or governmental. For example, micro-level sociologists observe how individuals manage their impressions towards one another in face-to-face encounters. In contrast, macro-level sociologists examine if there are relationships between, say, the nation's economic conditions and the crime rates, or between race/ethnicity and social class.

Culture is a historically developed, yet ever changing, set of rules, know-hows, and tools that support social life and survival both on the individual level and on the group level. Our cultural survival vehicles were built not from coalitions of genes but from coalitions of ideas roped together by cultural evolution (Pagel 2012, p. 46), or of accumulated knowledge through countless generations of our ancestors.

Sociologist C. Wright Mills suggests that in addition to information about, and reason for, what is going on in our society, we need to have “a quality of mind” or **sociological imagination** that enables us to grasp the relations between history (i.e., the process of changing social structures) and biography (a person’s behaviors and attitudes) (2000 [1959], pp. 5-6; paraphrased). It can be seen as a discerning method of understanding people in connection to their social conditions and locations.

The Location of Sociology among Other Fields of Studies

Humanities	Social Sciences	Natural Sciences
Literature, Philosophy, Music, Art, Religion...	Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, Economics, Political Science...	Physics, Biology, Chemistry, Astronomy, Mathematics...

Subjective/Subjective	Subjective/Objective	Objective/Objective
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The Location of "Sociology" among Other Fields of Studies

In order to locate *sociology* among other fields of studies, first, we can categorize all studies into two groups: *humanities* and *sciences*. The fields of **humanities** include literature, philosophy, music, art, religion, and so forth. They deal with subjective matters in subjective fashion, based on intuitions, inspirations, and/or opinions. Views offered in humanities may not be universally agreeable; they are subjective (opinions), not objective (facts). For example, an oil painting that may appear to be very beautiful to some may not be so to some others, and that's okay in humanities.

Second, sciences can be further categorized into two subgroups: *natural sciences* and *social sciences*. **Natural sciences** include physics, biology, chemistry, astronomy, mathematics, and so forth. They study objective matters in objective fashion, based on empirically observed and/or measured facts. Unlike reactions to works in humanities (e.g., oil paintings, novels, and songs) that can vary more or less, which is okay, if scientific studies of a given natural phenomenon offer two or more different answers, that wouldn't be okay at all. For example, "1+1" has to be 2, invariably, which is a fact, not an opinion (is it?). Or the boiling point of water at 1 atmosphere has to be 100° C (or 212° F), always. Who boils the water doesn't matter at all; things react to the same situation in the same way, regardless.

People are not things; they react to the same situation in different ways, depending on their own subjective perceptions of the reality, which are shaped by their own particular social conditions and locations. **Social sciences** study subjective matters (what people do and how they think) in objective fashion, based on empirically observed and/or measured facts. The fields in social sciences include sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, political science, and so forth. Among these, the main focus of the first three is directly placed on "people."

The difference between sociology and psychology lies, roughly saying, in that the former tries to seek the cause of people's behaviors and attitudes in the external environment (i.e., their social conditions and locations), while the latter tries to find that in the inner environment (their psyche). The difference between sociology and anthropology lies in that although both refer to the

external environment (especially "culture"), the former studies social realities in modern societies growing after the Industrial Revolution (i.e., industrial and postindustrial societies) and the latter, those in premodern societies observed before the Industrial Revolution (hunting-gathering, horticultural-pastoral, and agricultural/feudalistic societies).

To restate what **sociology** is about, it is the scientific study of what people in industrial and postindustrial societies do (behaviors) and how they think (attitudes), referring to their social conditions and social locations, the scientific study that this textbook introduces through various topics.



Modern U.S. families may be very different in structure from what was

historically typical. (Photo courtesy of
Tony Alter/Wikimedia Commons)

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Glossary

culture

a group's shared practices, values, and beliefs

figuration

the process of simultaneously analyzing the behavior of an individual and the society that shapes that behavior

reification

an error of treating an abstract concept as though it has a real, material existence

society

a group of people who live in a defined geographical area who interact with one another and who share a common culture

sociological imagination

the ability to understand how your own past relates to that of other people, as well as to history in general and societal structures in particular

sociology

the systematic study of society and social interaction

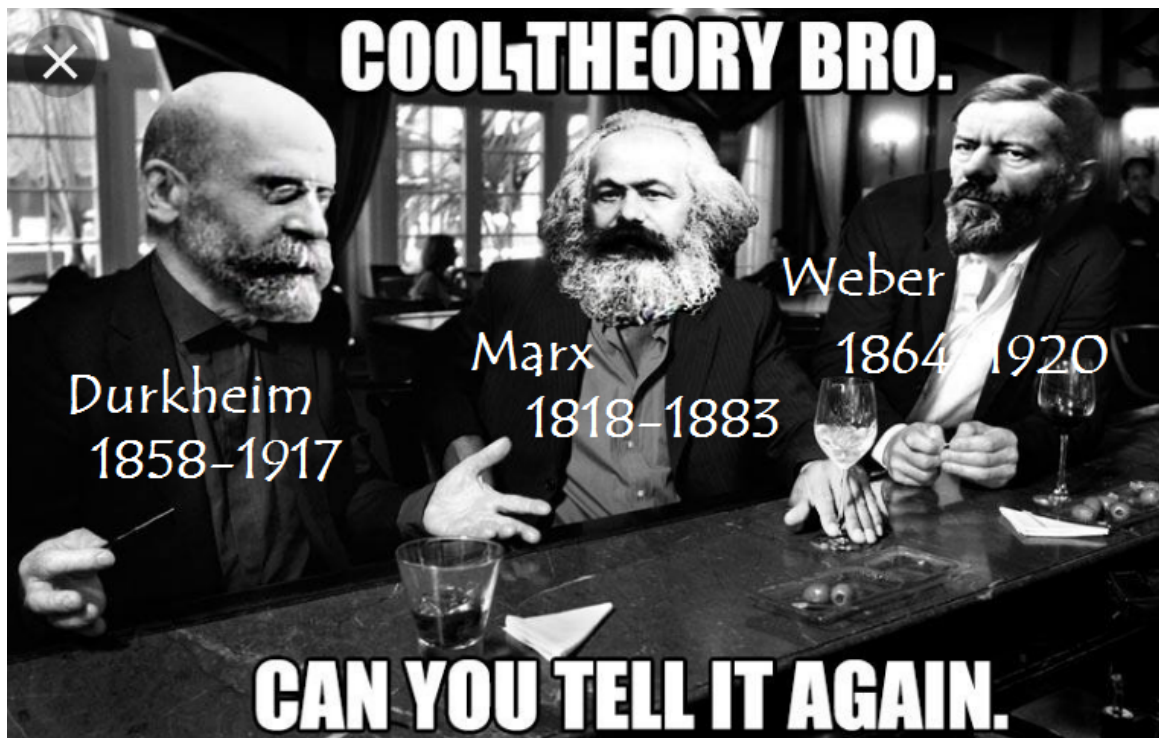
The History of Sociology

- Explain why sociology emerged when it did
- Describe how sociology became a separate academic discipline

The turn of the nineteenth century saw great changes as the effects of **the Industrial Revolution**, which had started half a century ago. It was a time of great social, economic, and political upheaval with the collapse of feudalism and the rise of capitalism. In the first half of the nineteenth century alone, about 5 million Europeans, who had lost their traditionally perpetuated social environments based mostly on farming, crossed the Atlantic Ocean in search for new jobs in the U.S. (Jones 1992). The field of study, new in that era, named "sociology" was *born* under such circumstances called "modernization."

Creating a Discipline

The Three Classical Theorists



From the left, Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber.
(Photo courtesy of pinterest.com)

Karl Marx (1818–1883) is one of the most important contributors to the birth of sociology. He was bitterly critical about what was going on under the rise, and the growth, of capitalism. In 1848, he, together with Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), coauthored *The Communist Manifesto* (2006 [1848]), a very influential antithesis against capitalism--whose copy is kept in most libraries including, of course, the BMCC library.

According to Marx and Engels, capitalism--an economic system characterized by private ownership, free competition, and profit motive (will be discussed in Ch. 18)--led to irreconcilably great disparities in social, economic, and political power between the owners of the means of production (bourgeoisie) and the workers (proletariat). The vast majority of workers, previously peasants, who had left the land to work in cities, earned barely enough to eat. Things were so bad that the average worker died at age 30 (Edgerton 1992, p. 87). Such inequalities remain thickly still today; some CEOs of giant corporations enjoy private jets while many working class people, who work day and night, still face the difficulty in paying the rent of their small apartments.

Marx predicted that inequalities of capitalism would become so extreme that workers would eventually revolt. This would lead to the collapse of capitalism, which would be replaced by communism, a political and economic system characterized by public ownership, cooperation, and equal distribution of necessities (will be discussed in Ch. 18). Marx believed that communism was the ultimately equitable system for all humans.

Marx's predictions remained to be a kind of fantasy until recently. According to a U.S. weekly magazine *The Nation* (2019, Nov. 25), however, global rebellions against so-called *neoliberalism*--i.e., a globally applicable method for preserving the current overwhelming imbalance of power--have started in many countries almost simultaneously in 2019, including Algeria, Bolivia (see the image below), Chile, Colombia,

Ecuador, Egypt, France, Germany, Guinea, Haiti, Honduras, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Spain, Sudan, the UK, and Zimbabwe. They might turn out to be the starting point of Marx's prediction of proletariat revolutions. Let's keep our eyes on them...



Global Rebellions against Neoliberalism: A supporter of former president Evo Morales in Bolivia, November 13, 2019. (AP / Natacha Pisarenko)

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) helped establish sociology as a formal academic discipline by founding the first European department of sociology at the University of Bordeaux in 1895 and by publishing his *Rules of the Sociological Method* (1896). In another important work, *Division of Labor in Society* (1893), Durkheim laid out his theory on how societies transformed from an old type (agricultural) to a new one (industrial). Also, his theory of *Suicide* (1897), constructed more than a century ago, is still used as a structurally clear model of sociological theories in sociological courses, such as this.

Durkheim examined suicide statistics in census data of major European countries in order to seek patterns that shaped the phenomenon. He found, to mention but a few, that suicide rates were higher among: single men compared to married men; childless people compared to parents; Protestants (who value individualism) compared to Catholics and Jews (who are bonded to other people through the church or synagogue). These findings led him to conclude that social isolation (or the lack of solidarity) was a major cause of suicide.

Suicide tends to be seen as an ultimate personal decision and, thus, as a psychological phenomenon. Durkheim, however, proved through his study based on empirical data that it is a social phenomenon to a great extent, and his study helped firmly establish the position of sociology among other fields of social science.

Max Weber (1864-1920) is known best for his 1904 book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Basically, the Christian doctrine admonishes greediness for wealth, as seen in the saying: It is easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter God's Kingdom. However, the reformed denomination Protestantism (and Calvinism) encourages wealth as grace and labor as a devotion to God, interpreting the money as a sign of God's selection. Weber pointed to this ethic, which no other religion maintains, as the foremost energy for the rise of capitalism.

Weber's theory of the rise of capitalism based on Protestant work ethic remains controversial. Some support Weber's theory as a plausible explanation for the rise of capitalism. Others simply dismiss the connection between "work ethic" and "capitalism," suggesting that capitalism is not the system of work ethic, but that of gigantic financial and political power.

Weber differentiated between modern and premodern societies in terms of **rationalization**, i.e., the replacement of traditions, values, and emotions as the basis of actions with rational, calculated ones. In our contemporary societies, that is, our planning is dependent on market fluctuation, labor costs, mortgage rates, inventories, and zoning regulations (Rifkin 1987, p.

69). The goal is to finish our planning in the shortest time possible, at the least cost (efficiency, profit, and utility).

By sharp contrast, planning of premodern society has to be intimately bound up with group feelings and sensitivities about traditionally perpetuated cultural norms, such as the considerations for the superstitious matters, the spirituality of the people, the mother nature, etc., etc.

Weber also offered the discussions about **bureaucratization** in order to describe modern organizations' particular characteristics. They include hierarchy of (or vertically structured) authority, the division of labor based on specialization, written (and no hidden) records and rules, and impersonality of positions and interactions--which will be examined in Ch. 6, Groups and Organization.

Summary

Sociology was developed as a way to study and try to understand the changes to society brought on by the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of the earliest sociologists thought that societies and individuals' roles in society could be studied using the same scientific methodologies that were used in the natural sciences, while others believed that it was impossible to predict human behavior scientifically, and still others debated the value of such predictions. Those perspectives continue to be represented within sociology today.

Further Research

Many sociologists helped shape the discipline. To learn more about prominent sociologists and how they changed sociology check out <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/ferdinand-toennies>.

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Glossary

antipositivism

the view that social researchers should strive for subjectivity as they worked to represent social processes, cultural norms, and societal values

generalized others

the organized and generalized attitude of a social group

positivism

the scientific study of social patterns

qualitative sociology

in-depth interviews, focus groups, and/or analysis of content sources as the source of its data

quantitative sociology

statistical methods such as surveys with large numbers of participants

significant others

specific individuals that impact a person's life

verstehen

a German word that means to understand in a deep way

Theoretical Perspectives

- Explain what sociological theories are and how they are used
- Understand the similarities and differences between structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism

Sociologists study social events and develop theories in attempts to explain why things happen as they do, referring to social conditions (attached to our society as a whole) and social locations (attached to our "self"). A sociological **theory** is an explanation of how a given phenomenon happens, connecting that to the most closely related factor. A phenomenon in question is called the "dependent variable" and a closely related factor to it, the "independent variable." (About "variable," more will be explained in Ch. 2, Sociological Research.)

For example, although **suicide** is generally considered a personal decision, Émile Durkheim connected this phenomenon to social ties, or social **solidarity**, as one of the most closely related factors. Thus, he hypothesized that differences in suicide risks could be explained by the strength of solidarity. In his theory, suicide is the dependent variable and solidarity, the independent variable, that is, suicide depends on solidarity.

Durkheim gathered a large amount of data about Europeans who had ended their lives, and indeed found differences based on the strength of social ties, solidarity. Among men of similar ages who committed suicide, for example, more unmarried ones (low solidarity) were counted than married ones (good solidarity). Similarly, Protestants, who tend to be individualistic (low solidarity), were more likely to commit suicide than Catholics or Jews, who are collectively bonded (good solidarity) within themselves.

The introductory level of sociology courses (such as this) offers three major perspectives. Called **paradigms**, they are theoretical frameworks, each of which helps understand social realities through its own lens, including structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. These three will be referred to throughout the course. So you need to, and will, become familiar with these. Only three!

Sociological Paradigm	Level of Analysis	Focus
Structural Functionalism	Macro or mid	The way each part of society functions to maintain the whole structure
Conflict Theory	Macro	Inequalities between different social locations (e.g., social class, race/ethnicity, gender, and so on)
Symbolic Interactionism	Micro	Face-to-face interactions of individuals in everyday life through socially constructed and shared symbols

Sociological Theories or Perspectives

Functionalism

Émile Durkheim, one of the giant classical sociologists, maintained that society is a complex system of interrelated and interdependent parts that work together to maintain stability (Durkheim 1893), the theoretical view called **functionalism** or structural functionalism.

Durkheim suggested that sociologists must be aware that social facts, which all serve to govern social life, are external of, and coercive to, individuals. Again, don't say "I think therefore I am."

To understand social facts, take the "language," for example. It is external of us. That is, it is our society that maintains it, not ourselves; we just learn and speak it. It is also coercive to us. No one is free from its rules; even such outlaws as gangsters follow its rules when they speak. Otherwise, other people wouldn't understand what they are saying. When a gangster means "I'll kill you" but says, "ll ll ou," people would be puzzled and say, "Excuse me? How can I help you?"

Another noted structural functionalist, Robert Merton (1910–2003), pointed out that social processes often have many functions, which simply mean "good things." There are two different types of functions: manifest functions and latent functions.

Manifest functions are good things resulting from the main purpose of a given social system, while **latent functions** are good things resulting not from the main purpose of a system, or to say, its by-products. The manifest functions of elementary school, for example, include skills in reading, writing, and calculating. Its latent functions include making friends, which is good but is not the main purpose of the system.

On the other hand, social processes that have undesirable consequences for the operation of society are called **dysfunctions**, which simply mean "bad things." Although religion has a lot of functions, for example, its negative consequences can be also seen in many religious wars in our human history.

Criticism

One criticism of the structural-functional theory is that it can't adequately explain social change. Also problematic is the somewhat circular nature of this theory; repetitive behavior patterns are assumed to have a function, yet we profess to know that they have a function only because they are repeated. Furthermore, dysfunctions may continue, even though they don't serve a function, which seemingly contradicts the basic premise of the theory. Many sociologists now believe that functionalism is no longer useful as a macro-level theory, but that it does serve a useful purpose in some mid-level analyses.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory focuses on inequalities between different social locations, such as those in social class, race/ethnicity, gender, and so on. Karl Marx (1818–1883) initiated this perspective, observing lots of conflicts between capitalists (bourgeoisie) and laborers (proletariat). According to Marx, and his partner Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), "the modern bourgeois society

that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society (called “modernization”) has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established... new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones” (Marx and Engels 2002 [1848]).

Here is the golden rule of capitalism: the lower the wage, the higher the profit. That is, bourgeoisie try to set the wage level as low as possible in order to make more profit. On the other hand, of course, proletariat demand the minimum wages as high as possible. Conflict? You bet!

More recently, inequality based on gender or race has been explained in a similar manner and has identified institutionalized power structures that help maintain inequality between groups. Janet Saltzman Chafetz (1941–2006) presented a model of **feminist theory** that attempts to explain the forces that maintain gender inequality as well as a theory of how such a system can be changed (Turner 2003).

Similarly, critical race theory grew out of a critical analysis of race and racism from a legal point of view. Critical race theory looks at structural inequality based on white privilege and associated wealth, power, and prestige.

Criticism

Note:

Farming and Locavores: How Sociological Perspectives Might View Food Consumption

The consumption of food is a commonplace, daily occurrence, yet it can also be associated with important moments in our lives. Eating can be an individual or a group action, and eating habits and customs are influenced by our cultures. In the context of society, our nation’s food system is at the core of numerous social movements, political issues, and economic debates. Any of these factors might become a topic of sociological study.

A structural-functional approach to the topic of food consumption might be interested in the role of the agriculture industry within the nation's economy and how this has changed from the early days of manual-labor farming to modern mechanized production. Another examination might study the different functions that occur in food production: from farming and harvesting to flashy packaging and mass consumerism.

A conflict theorist might be interested in the power differentials present in the regulation of food, by exploring where people's right to information intersects with corporations' drive for profit and how the government mediates those interests. Or a conflict theorist might be interested in the power and powerlessness experienced by local farmers versus large farming conglomerates, such as the documentary *Food Inc.* depicts as resulting from Monsanto's patenting of seed technology. Another topic of study might be how nutrition varies between different social classes.

A sociologist viewing food consumption through a symbolic interactionist lens would be more interested in micro-level topics, such as the symbolic use of food in religious rituals, or the role it plays in the social interaction of a family dinner. This perspective might also study the interactions among group members who identify themselves based on their sharing a particular diet, such as vegetarians (people who don't eat meat) or locavores (people who strive to eat locally produced food).

Just as structural functionalism was criticized for focusing too much on the stability of societies, conflict theory has been criticized because it tends to focus on conflict to the exclusion of recognizing stability. Many social structures are extremely stable or have gradually progressed over time rather than changing abruptly as conflict theory would suggest.

Symbolic Interactionist Theory

Symbolic interactionism is a micro-level sociology that focuses on how individuals interact with one another in everyday life. Communication—the exchange of meaning through symbols—is believed to be the way in which people make sense of their social worlds. It is important to see that the social reality does not necessarily stem from facts, but mostly from socially

constructed meanings and images through which people interact and, by doing so, make them "real." Theorists Herman and Reynolds (1994) note that this perspective sees people as being active in shaping the social world rather than simply being acted upon.

George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) is considered a founder of symbolic interactionism though he never published his work on it (LaRossa and Reitzes 1993). Mead's student, Herbert Blumer, coined the term "symbolic interactionism" and outlined these basic premises: humans interact with things based on meanings ascribed to those things; the ascribed meaning of things comes from our interactions with others and society; the meanings of things are interpreted by a person when dealing with things in specific circumstances (Blumer 1969). If you love books, for example, a symbolic interactionist might propose that you learned that books are good or important in the interactions you had with family, friends, school, or church; maybe your family had a special reading time each week, getting your library card was treated as a special event, or bedtime stories were associated with warmth and comfort.

Social scientists who apply symbolic-interactionist thinking look for patterns of interaction between individuals. Their studies often involve observation of one-on-one interactions. For example, while a conflict theorist studying a political protest might focus on class difference, a symbolic interactionist would be more interested in how individuals in the protesting group interact, as well as the signs and symbols protesters use to communicate their message. The focus on the importance of symbols in building a society led sociologists like Erving Goffman (1922–1982) to develop a technique called **dramaturgical analysis**. Goffman used theater as an analogy for social interaction and recognized that people's interactions showed patterns of cultural "scripts." Because it can be unclear what part a person may play in a given situation, he or she has to improvise his or her role as the situation unfolds (Goffman 1958).

Studies that use the symbolic interactionist perspective are more likely to use qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews or participant observation, because they seek to understand the symbolic worlds in which research subjects live.

Constructivism is an extension of symbolic interaction theory which proposes that reality is what humans cognitively construct it to be. We develop social constructs based on interactions with others, and those constructs that last over time are those that have meanings which are widely agreed-upon or generally accepted by most within the society. This approach is often used to understand what's defined as deviant within a society. There is no absolute definition of deviance, and different societies have constructed different meanings for deviance, as well as associating different behaviors with deviance. One situation that illustrates this is what you believe you're to do if you find a wallet in the street. In the United States, turning the wallet in to local authorities would be considered the appropriate action, and to keep the wallet would be seen as deviant. In contrast, many Eastern societies would consider it much more appropriate to keep the wallet and search for the owner yourself; turning it over to someone else, even the authorities, would be considered deviant behavior.

Criticism

Research done from this perspective is often scrutinized because of the difficulty of remaining objective. Others criticize the extremely narrow focus on symbolic interaction. Proponents, of course, consider this one of its greatest strengths.

Sociological Theory Today

These three approaches are still the main foundation of modern sociological theory, but some evolution has been seen. Structural-functionalism was a dominant force after World War II and until the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, sociologists began to feel that structural-functionalism did not sufficiently explain the rapid social changes happening in the United States at that time.

Conflict theory then gained prominence, as there was renewed emphasis on institutionalized social inequality. Critical theory, and the particular aspects

of feminist theory and critical race theory, focused on creating social change through the application of sociological principles, and the field saw a renewed emphasis on helping ordinary people understand sociology principles, in the form of public sociology.

Postmodern social theory attempts to look at society through an entirely new lens by rejecting previous macro-level attempts to explain social phenomena. Generally considered as gaining acceptance in the late 1970s and early 1980s, postmodern social theory is a micro-level approach that looks at small, local groups and individual reality. Its growth in popularity coincides with the constructivist aspects of symbolic interactionism.

Summary

Sociologists develop theories to explain social events, interactions, and patterns. A theory is a proposed explanation of those social interactions. Theories have different scales. Macro-level theories, such as structural functionalism and conflict theory, attempt to explain how societies operate as a whole. Micro-level theories, such as symbolic interactionism, focus on interactions between individuals.

Further Research

People often think of all conflict as violent, but many conflicts can be resolved nonviolently. To learn more about nonviolent methods of conflict resolution check out the Albert Einstein Institution

<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/ae-institution>

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Glossary

conflict theory

a theory that looks at society as a competition for limited resources

constructivism

an extension of symbolic interaction theory which proposes that reality is what humans cognitively construct it to be

dramaturgical analysis

a technique sociologists use in which they view society through the metaphor of theatrical performance

dynamic equilibrium

a stable state in which all parts of a healthy society work together properly

dysfunctions

social patterns that have undesirable consequences for the operation of society

function

the part a recurrent activity plays in the social life as a whole and the contribution it makes to structural continuity

functionalism

a theoretical approach that sees society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of individuals that make up that society

grand theories

an attempt to explain large-scale relationships and answer fundamental questions such as why societies form and why they change

hypothesis

a testable proposition

latent functions

the unrecognized or unintended consequences of a social process

macro-level

a wide-scale view of the role of social structures within a society

manifest functions

sought consequences of a social process

micro-level theories

the study of specific relationships between individuals or small groups

paradigms

philosophical and theoretical frameworks used within a discipline to formulate theories, generalizations, and the experiments performed in support of them

social facts

the laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashions, rituals, and all of the cultural rules that govern social life

social institutions

patterns of beliefs and behaviors focused on meeting social needs

social solidarity

the social ties that bind a group of people together such as kinship, shared location, and religion

symbolic interactionism

a theoretical perspective through which scholars examine the relationship of individuals within their society by studying their communication (language and symbols)

theory

a proposed explanation about social interactions or society

Why Study Sociology?

- Explain why it is worthwhile to study sociology
- Identify ways sociology is applied in the real world



The research
of
sociologists
Kenneth and
Mamie Clark
helped the
Supreme
Court decide
to end
“separate but
equal” racial
segregation
in schools in
the United
States.
(Photo
courtesy of
public
domain)

When Elizabeth Eckford tried to enter Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in September 1957, she was met by an angry crowd. But she knew she had the law on her side. Three years earlier in the landmark *Brown vs. the Board of Education* case, the U.S. Supreme Court had overturned twenty-one state laws that allowed blacks and whites to be taught in separate school systems as long as the school systems were “equal.” One of the major factors influencing that decision was research conducted by the husband-and-wife team of sociologists, Kenneth and Mamie Clark. Their research showed that segregation was harmful to young black schoolchildren, and the Court found that harm to be unconstitutional.

Since it was first founded, many people interested in sociology have been driven by the scholarly desire to contribute knowledge to this field, while others have seen it as way not only to study society but also to improve it. Besides desegregation, sociology has played a crucial role in many important social reforms, such as equal opportunity for women in the workplace, improved treatment for individuals with mental handicaps or learning disabilities, increased accessibility and accommodation for people with physical handicaps, the right of native populations to preserve their land and culture, and prison system reforms.

The prominent sociologist Peter L. Berger (1929–), in his 1963 book *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*, describes a sociologist as “someone concerned with understanding society in a disciplined way.” He asserts that sociologists have a natural interest in the monumental moments of people’s lives, as well as a fascination with banal, everyday occurrences. Berger also describes the “aha” moment when a sociological theory becomes applicable and understood:

“[T]here is a deceptive simplicity and obviousness about some sociological investigations. One reads them, nods at the familiar scene, remarks that one has heard all this before and don't people have better things to do than to waste their time on truisms—until one is suddenly brought up against an insight that radically questions everything one had previously assumed about this familiar scene. This is the point at which one begins to sense the excitement of sociology. (Berger 1963)”

Sociology can be exciting because it teaches people ways to recognize how they fit into the world and how others perceive them. Looking at themselves and society from a sociological perspective helps people see where they connect to different groups based on the many different ways they classify themselves and how society classifies them in turn. It raises awareness of how those classifications—such as economic and status levels, education, ethnicity, or sexual orientation—affect perceptions.

Sociology teaches people not to accept easy explanations. It teaches them a way to organize their thinking so that they can ask better questions and formulate better answers. It makes people more aware that there are many different kinds of people in the world who do not necessarily think the way they do. It increases their willingness and ability to try to see the world from other people's perspectives. This prepares them to live and work in an increasingly diverse and integrated world.

Sociology in the Workplace

Employers continue to seek people with what are called “transferable skills.” This means that they want to hire people whose knowledge and education can be applied in a variety of settings and whose skills will contribute to various tasks. Studying sociology can provide people with this wide knowledge and a skill set that can contribute to many workplaces, including

- an understanding of social systems and large bureaucracies;
- the ability to devise and carry out research projects to assess whether a program or policy is working;
- the ability to collect, read, and analyze statistical information from polls or surveys;
- the ability to recognize important differences in people’s social, cultural, and economic backgrounds;
- skills in preparing reports and communicating complex ideas; and

- the capacity for critical thinking about social issues and problems that confront modern society. (Department of Sociology, University of Alabama)

Sociology prepares people for a wide variety of careers. Besides actually conducting social research or training others in the field, people who graduate from college with a degree in sociology are hired by government agencies and corporations in fields such as social services, counseling (e.g., family planning, career, substance abuse), community planning, health services, marketing, market research, and human resources. Even a small amount of training in sociology can be an asset in careers like sales, public relations, journalism, teaching, law, and criminal justice.

Note:**Please “Friend” Me: Students and Social Networking**

The phenomenon known as Facebook was designed specifically for students. Whereas earlier generations wrote notes in each other’s printed yearbooks at the end of the academic year, modern technology and the Internet ushered in dynamic new ways for people to interact socially. Instead of having to meet up on campus, students can call, text, and Skype from their dorm rooms. Instead of a study group gathering weekly in the library, online forums and chat rooms help learners connect. The availability and immediacy of computer technology has forever changed the ways in which students engage with each other.

Now, after several social networks have vied for primacy, a few have established their place in the market and some have attracted niche audience. While Facebook launched the social networking trend geared toward teens and young adults, now people of all ages are actively “friending” each other. LinkedIn distinguished itself by focusing on professional connections and served as a virtual world for workplace networking. Newer offshoots like Foursquare help people connect based on the real-world places they frequent, while Twitter has cornered the market on brevity.

The widespread ownership of smartphones adds to this social experience; the Pew Research Center (2012) found that the majority of people in the United States with mobile phones now have “smart” phones with Internet capability. Many people worldwide can now access Facebook, Twitter, and other social media from virtually anywhere, and there seems to be an increasing acceptance of smartphone use in many diverse and previously prohibited settings. The outcomes of smartphone use, as with other social media, are not yet clear.

These newer modes of social interaction have also spawned harmful consequences, such as cyberbullying and what some call FAD, or Facebook Addiction Disorder. Researchers have also examined other potential negative impacts, such as whether Facebooking lowers a student’s GPA, or whether there might be long-term effects of replacing face-to-face interaction with social media.

All of these social networks demonstrate emerging ways that people interact, whether positive or negative. They illustrate how sociological topics are alive and changing today. Social media will most certainly be a developing topic in the study of sociology for decades to come.

Summary

Studying sociology is beneficial both for the individual and for society. By studying sociology people learn how to think critically about social issues and problems that confront our society. The study of sociology enriches students’ lives and prepares them for careers in an increasingly diverse world. Society benefits because people with sociological training are better prepared to make informed decisions about social issues and take effective action to deal with them.

Further Research

Social communication is rapidly evolving due to ever improving technologies. To learn more about how sociologists study the impact of these changes check out <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/media>

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Introduction to Sociological Research

class="introduction"

Many
believe that
crime rates
go up
during the
full moon,
but
scientific
research
does not
support this
conclusion.

(Photo
courtesy of
pxhere.com
)



Photo courtesy: pxhere.com

Laypeople (i.e., those who've never taken social science courses, such as this) can also have their own opinions about things happening around, and within, themselves. Chances are, however, their limited personal experiences and knowledge and socially shared prejudice/stereotypes tend to lead them to views more or less biased. To check your own view, for example, answer this question: What percent of Americans today believe that it is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good, hard spanking?



Photo Courtesy of Littleton View Co, Publishers

Here is the answer. Between 2000 and 2016, 71% of respondents in a series of surveys conducted in the U.S. ($n=13,038$) said they believed spanking was necessary (The General Social Survey 2016). Is this answer, based on the empirical data, close to your guessing?

In order to understand what a given phenomenon is *actually* like, social scientists (including sociologists, of course) conduct research to gather data (empirical evidence) related to the phenomenon in question, in systematic fashion. The research methods include surveys, field research, experiments, and so on.

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Glossary

empirical evidence

evidence that comes from direct experience, scientifically gathered data, or experimentation

meta-analysis

a technique in which the results of virtually all previous studies on a specific subject are evaluated together

Approaches to Sociological Research

- Define and describe the scientific method
- Explain how the scientific method is used in sociological research
- Understand the function and importance of an interpretive framework
- Define what reliability and validity mean in a research study

Sociologists begin their research by asking a question about how or why a given phenomenon happens in a given condition but doesn't happen in another condition. In other words, they ask, "What makes the difference between 'happening' and 'not happening'?" For example, some people support "spanking" while others don't. Or some people think about "suicide" while others never do so. Sociologists now ask: What makes the difference between those who support spanking and those who don't, or between those who think about suicide and those who never do so? In order to find the answer, *as unbiased as possible*, the researcher adopts scientific approaches and sets a particular research design. The following sections describe such approaches and designs.

The Scientific Method

The scientific method involves developing and testing theories about the world based on empirical evidence. It is defined by its commitment to systematic observation of the empirical world and strives to be objective, critical, skeptical, and logical. It involves a series of prescribed steps that have been established over centuries of scholarship.

Typically, the scientific method starts with these steps: 1) ask a question, 2) examine previously conducted studies, 3) choose variables (which will be explained below), 4) formulate a hypothesis (optional), 5) design research and gather data, 6) analyze them, and 7) report the findings.

The Flow of Scientific Method

1. Ask questions about a given phenomenon;
2. Review previously conducted studies;
3. Choose variables;
4. Formulate a hypothesis (optional);

5. Design research and gather data;
6. Analyze data in search for patterns; and
7. Report findings.

Variables

Scientific studies are based on "variables." A **variable** can be defined as a characteristic that has two or more attributes through which we can see what a given object (or person) is like--or anything that varies.

Gender, for example, is a variable that has two attributes, i.e., female and male. Race is also a variable, having several attributes. What about social class (a combined variable of education, occupation, and income)? Also, marital status, sexual orientation, age...?

Something that doesn't vary is called "constant." Speed of the light is said to be a constant, for example. Or sex of people who can get pregnant is a constant. Although students' GPA is a variable, to make it sure, the final grade for a student who never took exams at all throughout the semester seems to be a constant. In short, if there's only one answer--as in sex of a pregnant person--it's a constant, not a variable.

There are two types of variables that construct a theory, namely, the **independent variable** (or X) and the **dependent variable** (Y). The former (X) is the *cause*, or the condition that can make it happen, and the latter (Y), the *effect*, or a phenomenon that is made happen. Notice that the structure of a theory consists of only two things: the dependent variable (Y) and the independent variable (X).

Having the dependent variable (or a phenomenon in question) in mind, now, choose an independent variable that seems to make it happen. Durkheim, for example, chose "solidarity" (the independent variable) that he believed shapes the suicide risks (the dependent variable). Of course, there are many other variables that can affect the suicide risks. But a theory cannot be expected to drag tens of variables within itself. So focus on as few independent variables as possible.

Formulate a Hypothesis and Construct a Theory

A **hypothesis** can be understood as a baby (or a starting point) of a theory. In terms of the structure, they are the same, consisting of only two things: the dependent variable and the independent variable. When a hypothesis is approved by a large number of scholars, it can be considered a theory. It is a statement about how the dependent variable and the independent variable are related to one another; it makes a conjectural statement about the relationship between those variables.

The chronological order between the two types of variables is this. X (the independent variable) takes place, first, and then, Y (the dependent variable) may follow. To use the theory of suicide as an example for this, X (bad solidarity) takes place, first, and then, Y (suicide) may follow.

Although this example is not sociological, to make things simple, "smoking is a leading cause of cancer and death from cancer," according to National Cancer Institute. In this case, smoking is the independent variable and cancer, the dependent variable. X (smoking) takes place, first, and then, Y (cancer) may follow.

The Rule #1 to Understand Theories

To be noted, though, theories are not about 100% or 0%, but about tendencies, or "more likely" or "less likely." Indeed, not every smoker gets cancer. Conversely, some heavy smokers don't get cancer. Can these facts nullify the theory that connects smoking and cancer? The answer is "No" because the statement is about tendencies such that smokers are "more likely" than non-smokers to get cancer. This is one of the major rules to understand what theories are about.

The Rule #2 to Understand Theories

Another rule to understand what theories are about is that no theory can be expected to spell out a phenomenon in question. To use Durkheim's theory of suicide, for example, although suicide is explained in terms of solidarity, as aforementioned, there are many other causes for suicide, such as bankruptcy, serious illness, chronic physical pain, and so forth. Should Durkheim's theory be undermined? The answer is, again, "No" because a theory is not expected to spell out a phenomenon, but to explain it in relation to as few variables as possible.

Summary

Using the scientific method, a researcher conducts a study in five phases: asking a question, researching existing sources, formulating a hypothesis, conducting a study, and drawing conclusions. The scientific method is useful in that it provides a clear method of organizing a study. Some sociologists conduct research through an interpretive framework rather than employing the scientific method.

Scientific sociological studies often observe relationships between variables. Researchers study how one variable changes another. Prior to conducting a study, researchers are careful to apply operational definitions to their terms and to establish dependent and independent variables.

Further Research

For a historical perspective on the scientific method in sociology, read “The Elements of Scientific Method in Sociology” by F. Stuart Chapin (1914) in the *American Journal of Sociology*: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Method-in-Sociology>.

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“Scientific Method Lab,” the University of Utah, http://aspire.cosmic-ray.org/labs/scientific_method/sci_method_main.html.

Glossary

dependent variables

a variable changed by other variables

hypothesis

a testable educated guess about predicted outcomes between two or more variables

independent variables

variables that cause changes in dependent variables

interpretive framework

a sociological research approach that seeks in-depth understanding of a topic or subject through observation or interaction; this approach is not based on hypothesis testing

literature review

a scholarly research step that entails identifying and studying all existing studies on a topic to create a basis for new research

operational definitions

specific explanations of abstract concepts that a researcher plans to study

reliability

a measure of a study’s consistency that considers how likely results are to be replicated if a study is reproduced

scientific method

an established scholarly research method that involves asking a question, researching existing sources, forming a hypothesis, designing

and conducting a study, and drawing conclusions

validity

the degree to which a sociological measure accurately reflects the topic of study

Research Methods

- Differentiate between four kinds of research methods: surveys, field research, experiments, and secondary data analysis
- Understand why different topics are better suited to different research approaches

In planning a research design, sociologists generally choose from four widely used methods of social investigation: survey, field research, experiment, and secondary data analysis (or use of existing sources). Their choice of the methods depends on several conditions, such as the limitation of time and budget, the type of their topic, the accessibility of the research target, and so on.

Surveys

As a research method, a **survey** collects data from subjects who respond to a series of questions about attitudes and behaviors, often in the form of a questionnaire. The survey is one of the most widely used scientific research methods as it can be analyzed statistically. Also, the standard survey format allows participants a level of anonymity in which they can express personal ideas about sensitive matters, such as suicide, sexuality, and the like.



Questionnaires are a common research method; the U.S. Census is a well-known example. (Photo courtesy of Kathryn Decker/flickr)

Sociologists conduct surveys under controlled conditions for specific purposes. Surveys gather different types of information from people. While surveys are not great at capturing the ways people really behave in social situations, they are a great method for discovering how people feel and think—or at least how they say they feel and think. Surveys can track preferences for presidential candidates or reported individual behaviors (such as sleeping, driving, or texting habits) or factual information such as employment status, income, and education levels.

Population and Sample--and Random Sample

A survey targets a specific **population**, all people who share a given characteristic for the researcher to study. When the size of a population is too big, the researcher chooses to survey a small sector of a population called a **sample**: that is, a manageable number of subjects that should *represent* its own entire population. Okay, but how can it (a small number of subjects) represent its own ENTIRE population?

The success of a study depends on how well the population is represented by the sample. For this, the researcher uses a **random sample**, a method in which every person in a population has the same chance of being chosen in the sample. According to the laws of probability, random samples, as long as they are random samples, well represent the entire population. See below: an analogy of how a random sample works.

1. Population, 2. Sample, 3. Random Sample, and 4. Analysis



Courtesy of huislaw.com



Courtesy of wakystock.com



Courtesy of Clipartreview.com

As shown above,

1. A population can be likened to a large pot of soup.
2. A sample, to a ladle of soup.
3. Random sample, to stirring up the pot of soup.
4. Analysis, to sipping the ladle of soup.

Through random sample, and only through it, the researcher can accurately report the taste of the entire soup, or the tendency of a large number of people (population)

through a smaller size of sample.

Here is an example. The U.S. media outlets predict the presidential election, relying on their own surveys. In this case, the **population** consists of all American voters (231 million people). The typical number of voters who respond to the surveys is a little larger than 1,000. This collection of voters whose voice is directly studied is called a **sample**. The question is, how can this small number of voters represent all American voters? Statistically saying, again, if the method of choosing the voters is **random sample**, it should be able to represent its population--although it's not easy, and some researchers fail, embarrassingly.

Here is an embarrassing example of a failed random sample. In 1936, a research institute predicted that the Republican candidate would win landslide for the presidential election, based on its own survey. The result was, however, the Democratic candidate won landslide. What was wrong? The survey collected opinions from people found in telephone books and car registration lists. Hey, who owned telephones or cars in 1936!? Only rich people!! Those who didn't own telephones or cars at that time didn't have "the same chance of being chosen in the sample," but they were a large part of the population having their own voice.

An **interview** is a one-on-one conversation between the researcher and the subject, and it is a way of conducting surveys on a topic. Interviews are similar to the short-answer questions on surveys in that the researcher asks subjects a series of questions. However, participants are free to respond as they wish, without being limited by predetermined choices. In the back-and-forth conversation of an interview, a researcher can ask for clarification, spend more time on a subtopic, or ask additional questions. In an interview, a subject will ideally feel free to open up and answer questions that are often complex. There are no right or wrong answers. The subject might not even know how to answer the questions honestly.

Questions such as, "How did society's view of alcohol consumption influence your decision whether or not to take your first sip of alcohol?" or "Did you feel that the divorce of your parents would put a social stigma on your family?" involve so many factors that the answers are difficult to categorize. A researcher needs to avoid steering or prompting the subject to respond in a specific way; otherwise, the results will prove to be unreliable. And, obviously, a sociological interview is not an interrogation. The researcher will benefit from gaining a subject's trust, from empathizing or commiserating with a subject, and from listening without judgment.

Field Research

The work of sociology rarely happens in limited, confined spaces. Sociologists seldom study subjects in their own offices or laboratories. Rather, sociologists go out into the

world. They meet subjects where they live, work, and play. **Field research** refers to gathering **primary data** from a natural environment without doing a lab experiment or a survey. It is a research method suited to an interpretive framework rather than to the scientific method. To conduct field research, the sociologist must be willing to step into new environments and observe, participate, or experience those worlds. In field work, the sociologists, rather than the subjects, are the ones out of their element.

The researcher interacts with or observes a person or people and gathers data along the way. The key point in field research is that it takes place in the subject's natural environment, whether it's a coffee shop or tribal village, a homeless shelter or the DMV, a hospital, airport, mall, or beach resort.



Photo Courtesy of Olympic National Park

Sociological researchers travel across countries and cultures to interact with and observe subjects in their natural environments. (Photo courtesy of IMLS Digital Collections and Content/flickr and Olympic National Park)

Participant Observation

In 2000, a comic writer named Rodney Rothman wanted an insider's view of white-collar work. He slipped into the sterile, high-rise offices of a New York "dot com" agency. Every day for two weeks, he pretended to work there. His main purpose was simply to see whether anyone would notice him or challenge his presence. No one did. The receptionist greeted him. The employees smiled and said good morning. Rothman was accepted as part of the team. He even went so far as to claim a desk, inform the receptionist of his whereabouts, and attend a meeting. He published an article about his experience in *The New Yorker* called "My Fake Job" (2000). Later, he was discredited for allegedly fabricating some details of the story and *The New Yorker* issued an apology. However, Rothman's entertaining article still offered fascinating descriptions of the inside workings of a "dot com" company and exemplified the lengths to which a sociologist will go to uncover material.

Rothman had conducted a form of study called **participant observation**, in which researchers join people and participate in a group's routine activities for the purpose of observing them within that context. This method lets researchers experience a specific aspect of social life. A researcher might go to great lengths to get a firsthand look into a trend, institution, or behavior. Researchers temporarily put themselves into roles and record their observations. A researcher might work as a waitress in a diner, live as a homeless person for several weeks, or ride along with police officers as they patrol their regular beat. Often, these researchers try to blend in seamlessly with the population they study, and they may not disclose their true identity or purpose if they feel it would compromise the results of their research.



Is she a working waitress or a sociologist conducting a study using participant observation? (Photo courtesy of zoetnet/flickr)

Experiments

You've probably tested personal social theories. "If I study at night and review in the morning, I'll improve my retention skills." Or, "If I stop drinking soda, I'll feel better." If X, then Y. When you test your hypothetical assumption through an **experiment**, your results either prove or disprove it.

There are two main types of experiments: lab-based experiments and natural or field experiments. In a lab setting, the research can be controlled so that perhaps more data can be recorded in a certain amount of time. In a natural or field-based experiment, the generation of data cannot be controlled but the information might be considered more accurate since it was collected without interference or intervention by the researcher.

As a research method, either type of sociological experiment is useful for testing *if-then* statements: *if* a particular thing happens, *then* another particular thing will result. To set up a lab-based experiment, sociologists create artificial situations that allow them to manipulate variables.

A Typical Design of Experiments

A typical--that is, not every--experimental design separates participants into two groups. One is the **experimental group** and the other, the **control group**. All other things being as equal as possible, such as age, gender, and so on, there is only one difference between the two groups, the independent variable(s). That is, the experimental group is exposed to the independent variable(s), and the control group is not. If the independent variable (X) has an effect, then, there should be a difference between the two groups in the dependent variable (Y), in a while.

A math tutoring program can be an example of the independent variable whose effects (math skills, the dependent variable) can be tested through an experiment. The experimental design is this. Children in the experimental group take the program, and those in the control group don't. In a while, if the children in the experimental group perform in math tests better than those in the control group, we can conclude that the program is functional, that is, if the program (X), then better math skills (Y).

Or some scientists conduct experiments to test if GMOs (genetically modified organisms) can cause cancer. Typically, they use mice, separating tens of them into, on the one hand, the experimental group and, on the other, the control group. Which group do you think gets GMOs? Oh, no, no, for this kind of experiments, humans cannot be used--although in the real world, we are actually getting lots of GMOs...

Secondary Data Analysis

While sociologists often engage in original research studies, they also contribute knowledge to the discipline through **secondary data analysis**. Secondary data doesn't result from firsthand research collected from primary sources, but are the already completed work of other researchers. Sociologists might study works written by historians, economists, teachers, or early sociologists. They might search through periodicals, newspapers, or magazines from any period in history.

Summary

Sociological research is a fairly complex process. As you can see, a lot goes into even a simple research design. There are many steps and much to consider when collecting data on human behavior, as well as in interpreting and analyzing data in order to form conclusive results. Sociologists use scientific methods for good reason. The scientific method provides a system of organization that helps researchers plan and conduct the study while ensuring that data and results are reliable, valid, and objective.

The many methods available to researchers—including experiments, surveys, field studies, and secondary data analysis—all come with advantages and disadvantages. The strength of a study can depend on the choice and implementation of the appropriate method of gathering research. Depending on the topic, a study might use a single method or a combination of methods. It is important to plan a research design before undertaking a study. The information gathered may in itself be surprising, and the study design should provide a solid framework in which to analyze predicted and unpredicted data.

Method	Implementation	Advantages	Challenges
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Method	Implementation	Advantages	Challenges
Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaires • Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yields many responses • Can survey a large sample • Quantitative data are easy to chart 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be time consuming • Can be difficult to encourage participant response • Captures what people think and believe but not necessarily how they behave in real life
Field Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation • Participant observation • Ethnography • Case study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yields detailed, accurate real-life information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming • Data captures how people behave but not what they think and believe • Qualitative data is difficult to organize

Method	Implementation	Advantages	Challenges
Experiment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliberate manipulation of social customs and mores 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tests cause and effect relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hawthorne Effect • Ethical concerns about people's wellbeing
Secondary Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of government data (census, health, crime statistics) • Research of historic documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes good use of previous sociological information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data could be focused on a purpose other than yours • Data can be hard to find

Main Sociological Research Methods Sociological research methods have advantages and disadvantages.

Further Research

For information on current real-world sociology experiments, visit:
<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Sociology-Experiments>

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Glossary

case study

in-depth analysis of a single event, situation, or individual

content analysis

applying a systematic approach to record and value information gleaned from secondary data as it relates to the study at hand

correlation

when a change in one variable coincides with a change in another variable, but does not necessarily indicate causation

ethnography

observing a complete social setting and all that it entails

experiment

the testing of a hypothesis under controlled conditions

field research

gathering data from a natural environment without doing a lab experiment or a survey

Hawthorne effect

when study subjects behave in a certain manner due to their awareness of being observed by a researcher

interview

a one-on-one conversation between the researcher and the subject

nonreactive research

using secondary data, does not include direct contact with subjects and will not alter or influence people's behaviors

participant observation

when a researcher immerses herself in a group or social setting in order to make observations from an "insider" perspective

population

a defined group serving as the subject of a study

primary data

data that are collected directly from firsthand experience

quantitative data

represent research collected in numerical form that can be counted

qualitative data

comprise information that is subjective and often based on what is seen in a natural setting

random sample

a study's participants being randomly selected to serve as a representation of a larger population

samples

small, manageable number of subjects that represent the population

secondary data analysis

using data collected by others but applying new interpretations

surveys

collect data from subjects who respond to a series of questions about behaviors and opinions, often in the form of a questionnaire

Ethical Concerns

- Understand why ethical standards exist
- Demonstrate awareness of the American Sociological Association's Code of Ethics
- Define value neutrality

Sociologists conduct studies to shed light on human behaviors. Knowledge is a powerful tool that can be used toward positive change. And while a sociologist's goal is often simply to uncover knowledge rather than to spur action, many people use sociological studies to help improve people's lives. In that sense, conducting a sociological study comes with a tremendous amount of responsibility. Like any researchers, sociologists must consider their ethical obligation to avoid harming subjects or groups while conducting their research.

The American Sociological Association, or ASA, is the major professional organization of sociologists in North America. The ASA is a great resource for students of sociology as well. The ASA maintains a **code of ethics**—formal guidelines for conducting sociological research—consisting of principles and ethical standards to be used in the discipline. It also describes procedures for filing, investigating, and resolving complaints of unethical conduct.

Practicing sociologists and sociology students have a lot to consider. Some of the guidelines state that researchers must try to be skillful and fair-minded in their work, especially as it relates to their human subjects. Researchers must obtain participants' informed consent and inform subjects of the responsibilities and risks of research before they agree to partake. During a study, sociologists must ensure the safety of participants and immediately stop work if a subject becomes potentially endangered on any level.

Researchers are required to protect the privacy of research participants whenever possible. Even if pressured by authorities, such as police or courts, researchers are not ethically allowed to release confidential information. Researchers must make results available to other sociologists, must make public all sources of financial support, and must not accept

funding from any organization that might cause a conflict of interest or seek to influence the research results for its own purposes. The ASA's ethical considerations shape not only the study but also the publication of results.

Pioneer German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) identified another crucial ethical concern. Weber understood that personal values could distort the framework for disclosing study results. While he accepted that some aspects of research design might be influenced by personal values, he declared it was entirely inappropriate to allow personal values to shape the interpretation of the responses. Sociologists, he stated, must establish **value neutrality**, a practice of remaining impartial, without bias or judgment, during the course of a study and in publishing results (1949). Sociologists are obligated to disclose research findings without omitting or distorting significant data.

Is value neutrality possible? Many sociologists believe it is impossible to set aside personal values and retain complete objectivity. They caution readers, rather, to understand that sociological studies may, by necessity, contain a certain amount of value bias. It does not discredit the results but allows readers to view them as one form of truth rather than a singular fact. Some sociologists attempt to remain uncritical and as objective as possible when studying cultural institutions. Value neutrality does not mean having no opinions. It means striving to overcome personal biases, particularly subconscious biases, when analyzing data. It means avoiding skewing data in order to match a predetermined outcome that aligns with a particular agenda, such as a political or moral point of view. Investigators are ethically obligated to report results, even when they contradict personal views, predicted outcomes, or widely accepted beliefs.

Summary

Sociologists and sociology students must take ethical responsibility for any study they conduct. They must first and foremost guarantee the safety of their participants. Whenever possible, they must ensure that participants have been fully informed before consenting to be part of a study.

The ASA maintains ethical guidelines that sociologists must take into account as they conduct research. The guidelines address conducting studies, properly using existing sources, accepting funding, and publishing results.

Sociologists must try to maintain value neutrality. They must gather and analyze data objectively and set aside their personal preferences, beliefs, and opinions. They must report findings accurately, even if they contradict personal convictions.

Further Research

Founded in 1905, the ASA is a nonprofit organization located in Washington, DC, with a membership of 14,000 researchers, faculty members, students, and practitioners of sociology. Its mission is “to articulate policy and implement programs likely to have the broadest possible impact for sociology now and in the future.” Learn more about this organization at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/ASA>.

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Glossary

code of ethics

a set of guidelines that the American Sociological Association has established to foster ethical research and professionally responsible scholarship in sociology

value neutrality

a practice of remaining impartial, without bias or judgment during the course of a study and in publishing results

Introduction to Culture

class="introduction"

People
adhere to
various rules
and standards
that are
created and
maintained in
culture, such
as giving a
high five to
someone.

(Photo
courtesy of
Chris
Barnes/flickr
)



Glossary

culture

shared beliefs, values, and practices

society

people who live in a definable community and who share a culture

What Is Culture?

- Differentiate between culture and society
- Explain material versus nonmaterial culture
- Discuss the concept of cultural universalism as it relates to society
- Compare and contrast ethnocentrism and xenocentrism

“We don’t know who discovered water, but we’re pretty sure it wasn’t the fish” (Carpenter 1970). If the water is to the fish, then what is to the human? Oh no, don't say, "Isn't that the air?" Why? That's because this is a sociology course and because this chapter is specifically about culture. Yes, culture, one of the major social conditions that shapes what we do and how we think, is the answer to this question.

Here is a clarification of this answer. Although the fish doesn't "discover" the water while dipped in the water, if the fish got out of the water, it would painfully notice that the water is missing. Likewise, if people migrate from one society to another, or if their societies are drastically changing, they will notice how firmly their lives have been depending on their own old culture.

This is what actually happened to Europeans whose societies were drastically changing from the old type to the new one, a historically significant event called **modernization**, the main product of the **Industrial Revolution**. Having lost their old social environments and statuses--typically, peasants in small folk villages--many migrated to urban areas, 65% of whom (or 5 million), to the United States, in search for jobs (McKeown 2007).

In the new world, their old characteristics--obedient, honest, hard-working, communal, and docile--lost their values. Rather, for the same reason, for which they had been praised in their old villages, they were now looked down upon, or even discriminated against. The new environments required them to act as individuals not as folks. They must have felt as if they became the fish struggling with the water missing.

Returning to ourselves now, let’s notice that what those Europeans faced was just the starting point of social change that never ends since then.

Today indeed, our world keeps drastically changing under so-called globalization, under which people, money, and goods and services are bewilderingly moving around between, and within, the first world countries and the third world countries. Metaphorically, we've become the fish always trying to find a new way to live in such unknown environments, or maybe trying to return to the water.

Recall the definition of **culture**--a historically developed, yet ever changing set of rules, know-hows, and tools that support social life and survival both on the individual level and on the group level. As social environments keep drastically changing, we need to adjust our own culture to them, all the time, but our reactions to such changing environments are, always, far from uniform; some try to find new ways forward while others try to return to the "water" backward. This variance in our reactions can yield a variety of social issues. For example, some support the idea of "diversity" while others claim "Make America *white* again."



How would a
visitor from the
suburban United
States act and feel
on this crowded
Tokyo train?
(Photo courtesy of
simonglucas/flickr
)

Summary

Though “society” and “culture” are often used interchangeably, they have different meanings. A society is an entity in which its members interact with one another under some sets of rules, which include culture. Other than such rules (values and norms), culture also provides traditionally perpetuated ideas (know-hows) and tools that support survival both on the individual level and group level.

Further Research

In January 2011, a study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America presented evidence indicating that the hormone oxytocin could regulate and manage instances of ethnocentrism. Read the full article here:

<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/oxytocin>

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CA; Center for Global, International and Regional Studies.

Glossary

cultural imperialism

the deliberate imposition of one's own cultural values on another culture

cultural relativism

the practice of assessing a culture by its own standards, and not in comparison to another culture

cultural universals

patterns or traits that are globally common to all societies

culture shock

an experience of personal disorientation when confronted with an unfamiliar way of life

ethnocentrism

the practice of evaluating another culture according to the standards of one's own culture

material culture

the objects or belongings of a group of people

nonmaterial culture

the ideas, attitudes, and beliefs of a society

xenocentrism

a belief that another culture is superior to one's own

Elements of Culture

- Understand how values and beliefs differ from norms
- Explain the significance of symbols and language to a culture
- Explain the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis
- Discuss the role of social control within culture

Material vs. Nonmaterial

Every culture is made up of two aspects, namely, **material culture** (any cultural matters that we can see and touch) and **nonmaterial culture** (any cultural practices that we cannot see or touch unless actions taken). Major examples of the former (material culture) include food, shelter, and clothing. Those of the latter (nonmaterial culture) include "norms and values" (discussed below), the language, religion, music, dance, cooking, art, and so on.

Both material and nonmaterial culture are related to "a set of rules, know-hows, and tools that support social life and survival both on the individual level and on the group level," the definition of culture. This means that they summarize, or succinctly stand for, what cultures are for.

Values and Norms (Nonmaterial)

Values

Within nonmaterial culture, the most important elements, in terms of attitudes (how people think) and behaviors (what they do), are values and norms. Cultural **values** are socially shared "attitudes" toward what is important and what is not. They vary across societies and change over time.

For example, "Time is money," people say. But it is so only in our modern societies and was not in old types of societies. The clock is set at schools, factories, and offices, indeed, but it was not at farms. It became the indispensable instrument of industrialized and post-industrialized societies (Rifkin 1987, p. 102; paraphrased). Time is money today (in our modern societies) literally for those who are paid on the basis of the number of

hours they worked. It was not the case for farmers in small folk villages (premodern societies).

Other than "time," modern individuals tend to value distinction between achieved statuses and ascribed statuses (which will be discussed in Ch. 5, Society and Social Interaction), between self-interests and group's expectations, between private and public matters, between formal and informal matters, and so on.

Norms

Cultural **norms** govern socially acceptable "behaviors," i.e., they can be seen as rules for what is appropriate to do and what is not. Just like values, they also vary across societies and change over time. This means that following the norm of one's own society may be violating the norm of another society. This can involve "culture shock," a social psychological phenomenon resulting from an encounter with a totally different culture--which is discussed below.

Values and norms are oftentimes closely intertwined. Using the value of "time," for example, organizing an event without caring about time can be violating a norm of middle-class people in modern societies. Likewise, making someone stay in office after hours in modern societies is violating not just a cultural norm but also a formal rule.

Likewise, in our modern societies, in which privacy is valued, visiting other people's place without a call or text message, even if it is totally informal, can be considered the violation of the norm.

Cultural Universals

Again, cultures vary. On the other hand, though, there are cultural practices called **cultural universals** that can be observed in every society, although their forms may vary. This tells us that although cultures vary, human needs seem, to a great extent, universal. For example, the language varies across cultures, but in every society, people speak their language. The language is, thus, a cultural universal. Other examples include: music, dance, art, cooking, funeral, and so forth. Their forms, again, may vary, but every

society maintains these practices one way or another, and thus, they are cultural universals.

On the other hand, though, think about cultural practices that are not cultural universals. To have kids' birthday parties, for example, isn't pizza a kind of "must"? If there were no pizza served, kids would get mad or, at least, puzzled. But is pizza a cultural universal for kids' birthday parties? Or, we need to ask, are birthday parties themselves cultural universal, or to say, does every society have them? Think about it... What about watching TV? Surfing the Internet? Drinking cold beer, listening to headbanging rock music?

Ethnocentrism vs. Cultural Relativism--and Its Discontent

Ethnocentrism

Often, people firmly believe that all other people engage in cultural practices they themselves engage in. To them, in other words, every cultural aspect of their own is culturally universal. For example, some ask, "How do you get the marriage license in your country?" In many countries, unlike the U.S., there's no such thing as "marriage license." Or, "What's the most popular dessert in your country?" Sorry, but "dessert" is a European cultural custom, which although many Americans share, many others don't.

This tendency, in which "one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it," is called **ethnocentrism** (Sumner 2002 [1907], p. 13). It is a self-centered attitude on the group level. The type of group doesn't matter; it can be any, such as race/ethnicity, nations, cities, villages, schools, sport teams, and even gender. If that's about "marriage license" or "dessert," there's no problem. If that's about patriotism or racism, however, ethnocentrism can yield bitter conflicts.

For example, a poem "The White Man's Burden" written at the turn of the nineteenth century not only justified the conquest of non-whites (half devil and half child, according to this poem) by whites, but it even obliged the conquerors to "take up the white man's burden." The spirit of this poem seems to remain intact still today (see, e.g., Easterly 2006).

The ironic aspect of this tendency is, though, that ethnocentrism is negatively related to maturity or knowledgeability. That is, the less mature or knowledgeable, the more ethnocentric, or conversely, the more mature or knowledgeable, the less ethnocentric. This means that when people claim their group's superiority loud (more ethnocentric), they are exposing their inferiority loud (less mature) without noticing as such.

The conquest and colonization involve various events, such as political dominance, economic exploitation of labor power and natural resources, and, among others, **cultural imperialism**, the imposition of culture of the stronger on the weaker. This is an extremely negative aspect of ethnocentrism. For example, Japan annexed Korea in 1910, after which the conqueror launched a program to "Japanize" Korea, ultimately requiring Koreans to adopt Japanese names and worship in Japanese Shinto shrines (see, e.g., Kane et al. 2009).

To be noted, though, cultural imperialism is not unique to colonization, and can happen in some other ways. Anglo conformity, the assimilation ideology dominant until the recent past in the U.S., can be an example; though not related to colonization, this forced immigrants to speak Anglo Saxon's language, English, and follow Anglo norms and values, such as individuality (as opposed to collectivity), self-assertion (as opposed to harmony), and so forth.

Ethnocentrism does not necessarily yield bitter conflicts. Being able to love one's own group is psychologically healthy. If a boy says, for example, "I don't respect my family," there may be some psychologically unhealthy issues in his family. Hence, his parents should say to this boy, "What's the matter? Let's sit and talk."

The same thing can be also said about the nation. Some NFL players began kneeling during the national anthem in 2016, for example, in protest against its alleged racist content. In reaction to this, instead of caring about this protest, the U.S. president fiercely screamed, "Get that son of a bitch [the NFL players] off the field right now!"

NFL Players Protesting National Anthem



Photo courtesy of ShadowProof.com

As the kneeling controversy was spreading nationwide, the NFL league introduced a new policy mandating players and team personnel to either stand for the pregame playing of the anthem or remain in the locker room. Okay, but was this it?

Not so fast. In September, 2018, a major sports apparel company, Nike, decided to use Colin Kaepernick, the former NFL quarterback who started the kneeling protest, for its "Just Do It" campaign as its face. The controversy is going up in frames, anew...

Culture Shock

Ethnocentrism can be so strong that when confronted with a totally different culture, one may experience disorientation and suffer from one's own social identity shaken up. This social psychological phenomenon is called **culture shock**. The aforementioned Europeans who migrated from their small folk villages to urban areas, for example, must have heavily experienced this. Similarly today, the first generation of immigrants may face culture shock as things and actions, normal/valuable in their sending societies, may not be so at all in their host societies.

Cultural Relativism

According to anthropologist Diane Lewis (1973), anthropology emerged along with the expansion of Europe and the colonization of the non-Western world (p. 582). Although its literal meaning is “the study of humans,” it started as the study of, in reality, non-Europeans, or the colonized. As Europeans studied non-Europeans in their own views, anthropological reports back then could hardly be free from ethnocentric biases, always ranking non-European cultures below their own.

Anthropologist Franz Boas (1931 [1911]) criticized this ethnocentric tendency of anthropological reports in his era, softly suggesting that:

- It is somewhat difficult for us to recognize that the value which we attribute to our own civilization is due to the fact that we participate in this civilization...; but it is certainly conceivable that there may be other civilizations, based perhaps on different traditions and on a different equilibrium of emotion and reason which are of *no less value than ours*, although it may be impossible for us to appreciate their values without having grown up under their influence. (Boas 1931 [1911], p. 225; emphasis added)

His students, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Melville Herskovits, among others, based upon Boas’s suggestion, led the newer generation of anthropology, and their basic attitudes toward culture known as **cultural relativism** became a dominant view among social scientists in the early 20th century. They maintain that cultures are relative, and that there’s no absolute standard by which cultures can be ranked one over/under another. For example, one speaks French and the other, Chinese. Which is superior/inferior? The answer is: Neither. Cultural relativism, thus, supports the idea of “diversity” or multiculturalism.

Its Discontent

Recently, however, some have begun arguing against this view. Anthropologist Robert Edgerton (1992), for example, contends in his *Sick Societies* that if a culture maintains customs harmful to its people, especially weak ones (e.g., cannibalism, torture, infanticide, female circumcision, ceremonial rape, and so forth), we should not play with the idea of “relativism.” It’s not relative, but *absolutely* bad.

Social Changes

Cultural Lag

Social changes occur often rapidly, but people's mentality tends to have difficulty in catching up with them. This gap between social changes and people's unchanging mentality is called **cultural lag**. For example, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2015 that the Constitution guarantees a right to same sex marriage. This means that any laws or actions that can hinder this right to same sex marriage are considered illegal. This is a big social change. But is people's mentality toward same sex marriage smoothly changing in this direction? If not, that's cultural lag.

When the topic is about "cultural lag," some scholars exclusively (and *erroneously*) focus on the gap between culture and technological innovations (see, e.g., yourdictionary.com, wikipedia.org, etc.), but same-sex marriage is not a technological innovation, is it? What causes the confusion? William F. Ogburn, who coined the term "cultural lag," described this common societal phenomenon this way:

The various parts of modern culture are not changing at the same rate, some parts are changing much more rapidly than others; and that since there is a correlation and interdependence of parts, a rapid change in one part of our culture requires readjustments through other changes in the various correlated parts of culture. ... Where one part of culture changes first, *through some discovery or invention*, and occasions changes in some part of culture dependent upon it, there frequently is a delay in the changes occasioned in the dependent part of culture. (Ogburn 1922, pp. 200-1; emphasis added).

As emphasized above, Ogburn wrote "through some discovery or invention." This could mean, for sure, technological innovations but, ah-hah, is not necessarily limited to be so. It could be a new discovery of "marriage equality" for same-sex couples by the supreme court, behind which some people's old mentality seems to lag.

Cultural Diffusion

Unlike culture shock or cultural lag, **cultural diffusion** can be fun. It's about social changes through "mutual assimilation" or copying each other

in diverse societies. In New York, we can observe a plenty of examples. Some non-Asian people, for example, have tattoos in Chinese characters--whose meaning they may not clearly understand, though. Think about food, as well. American food today, according to Americans, includes French fries, pizza, California role, Hamburger with Swiss cheese... Are these actually American? Really?

Summary

A culture consists of many elements, such as norms and values. It is important to note that they vary across societies and change over time. Thus, cultural lag is happening all the time, everywhere. In diverse societies observed is cultural diffusion, social changes that involve two or more different cultures.

Further Research

The science-fiction novel, *Babel-17*, by Samuel R. Delaney was based upon the principles of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Read an excerpt from the novel here: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Babel-17>

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Glossary

beliefs

tenets or convictions that people hold to be true

folkways

direct, appropriate behavior in the day-to-day practices and expressions of a culture

formal norms

established, written rules

ideal culture

the standards a society would like to embrace and live up to

informal norms

casual behaviors that are generally and widely conformed to

language

a symbolic system of communication

mores

the moral views and principles of a group

norms

the visible and invisible rules of conduct through which societies are structured

real culture

the way society really is based on what actually occurs and exists

sanctions

a way to authorize or formally disapprove of certain behaviors

Sapir-Whorf hypothesis

the way that people understand the world based on their form of language

social control

a way to encourage conformity to cultural norms

symbols

gestures or objects that have meanings associated with them that are recognized by people who share a culture

values

a culture's standard for discerning what is good and just in society

Theoretical Perspectives on Culture

- Discuss the major theoretical approaches to cultural interpretation

Music, fashion, technology, and values—all are products of culture. But what do they mean? How do sociologists perceive and interpret culture based on these material and nonmaterial items? Let's finish our analysis of culture by reviewing them in the context of three theoretical perspectives: functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism.

Functionalists view society as a system in which all parts work—or function—together to create society as a whole. In this way, societies need culture to exist. Cultural norms function to support the fluid operation of society, and cultural values guide people in making choices. Just as members of a society work together to fulfill a society's needs, culture exists to meet its members' basic needs.

Functionalists also study culture in terms of values. Education is an important concept in the United States because it is valued. The culture of education—including material culture such as classrooms, textbooks, libraries, dormitories—supports the emphasis placed on the value of educating a society's members.



This statue of Superman stands in the center of Metropolis, Illinois. His pedestal reads “Truth—Justice—The American Way.” How would a

functionalist interpret this
statue? What does it reveal
about the values of
American culture? (Photo
courtesy of David
Wilson/flickr)

Conflict theorists view social structure as inherently unequal, based on power differentials related to issues like class, gender, race, and age. For a conflict theorist, culture is seen as reinforcing issues of "privilege" for certain groups based upon race, sex, class, and so on. Women strive for equality in a male-dominated society. Senior citizens struggle to protect their rights, their health care, and their independence from a younger generation of lawmakers. Advocacy groups such as the ACLU work to protect the rights of all races and ethnicities in the United States.

Inequalities exist within a culture's value system. Therefore, a society's cultural norms benefit some people but hurt others. Some norms, formal and informal, are practiced at the expense of others. Women were not allowed to vote in the United States until 1920. Gay and lesbian couples have been denied the right to marry in some states. Racism and bigotry are very much alive today. Although cultural diversity is supposedly valued in the United States, many people still frown upon interracial marriages. Same-sex marriages are banned in most states, and polygamy—common in some cultures—is unthinkable to most Americans.

At the core of conflict theory is the effect of economic production and materialism: dependence on technology in rich nations versus a lack of technology and education in poor nations. Conflict theorists believe that a society's system of material production has an effect on the rest of culture. People who have less power also have less ability to adapt to cultural change. This view contrasts with the perspective of functionalism. In the U.S. culture of capitalism, to illustrate, we continue to strive toward the promise of the American dream, which perpetuates the belief that the wealthy deserve their privileges.

Symbolic interactionism is a sociological perspective that is most concerned with the face-to-face interactions between members of society.

Interactionists see culture as being created and maintained by the ways people interact and in how individuals interpret each other's actions.

Proponents of this theory conceptualize human interactions as a continuous process of deriving meaning from both objects in the environment and the actions of others. This is where the term symbolic comes into play. Every object and action has a symbolic meaning, and language serves as a means for people to represent and communicate their interpretations of these meanings to others. Those who believe in symbolic interactionism perceive culture as highly dynamic and fluid, as it is dependent on how meaning is interpreted and how individuals interact when conveying these meanings.

We began this chapter by asking what culture is. Culture is comprised of all the practices, beliefs, and behaviors of a society. Because culture is learned, it includes how people think and express themselves. While we may like to consider ourselves individuals, we must acknowledge the impact of culture; we inherit thought language that shapes our perceptions and patterned behavior, including about issues of family and friends, and faith and politics.

To an extent, culture is a social comfort. After all, sharing a similar culture with others is precisely what defines societies. Nations would not exist if people did not coexist culturally. There could be no societies if people did not share heritage and language, and civilization would cease to function if people did not agree on similar values and systems of social control.

Culture is preserved through transmission from one generation to the next, but it also evolves through processes of innovation, discovery, and cultural diffusion. We may be restricted by the confines of our own culture, but as humans we have the ability to question values and make conscious decisions. No better evidence of this freedom exists than the amount of cultural diversity within our own society and around the world. The more we study another culture, the better we become at understanding our own.



This child's clothing may be culturally specific, but her facial expression is universal. (Photo courtesy of Beth Rankin/flickr)

Summary

There are three major theoretical approaches toward the interpretation of culture. A functionalist perspective acknowledges that there are many parts of culture that work together as a system to fulfill society's needs. Functionalists view culture as a reflection of society's values. Conflict theorists see culture as inherently unequal, based upon factors like gender, class, race, and age. An interactionist is primarily interested in culture as experienced in the daily interactions between individuals and the symbols that comprise a culture. Various cultural and sociological occurrences can be explained by these theories; however, there is no one "right" view through which to understand culture.

Introduction to Society and Social Interaction

class="introduction"

Sociologists
study how
societies
interact with
the
environment
and how they
use
technology.
(Photo
courtesy of
Garry
Knight/flickr
)



It was a school day, and Adriana, who was just entering eighth grade, woke up at 6:15 a.m. Before she got out of bed, she sent three text messages. One was to Jenn, who last year had moved five states away to a different time

zone. Even though they now lived far apart, the two friends texted on and off every day. Now Adriana wanted to tell Jenn that she liked the new boots in the photo that Jenn had posted on a social media site last night.

Throughout the day, Adriana used her smart phone to send fifty more texts, but she made no phone calls. She even texted her mother in the next room when she had a question about her homework. She kept in close electronic contact with all of her friends on a daily basis. In fact, when she wasn't doing homework or attending class, she was chatting and laughing with her friends via texts, tweets, and social media websites. Her smart phone was her main source of social interaction.

We can consider Adriana a typical teenager in the digital age—she constantly communicates with a large group of people who are not confined to one geographical area. This is definitely one of the benefits of new forms of communication: it is cheap and easy, and you can keep in touch with everyone at the same time. However, with these new forms of communication come new forms of societal interaction.

As we connect with each other more and more in an online environment, we make less time to interact in person. So the obvious question is this: are these forms of communication good developments in terms of social interaction? Or, if there are negative effects, what will they be? As we shall see, our reliance on electronic communication does have consequences. Beyond popularizing new forms of communication, it also alters the traditional ways in which we deal with conflict, the way we view ourselves in relationship to our surroundings, and the ways in which we understand social status.

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Types of Societies

- Describe the difference between preindustrial, industrial, and postindustrial societies
- Understand the role of environment on preindustrial societies
- Understand how technology impacts societal development



How does technology influence a society's daily occupations? (Photo courtesy of Mo Riza/flickr)

Sociologist Gerhard Lenski Jr. (1924–2015) defined societies in terms of their technological sophistication. The societal advancement and the technological sophistication are closely intertwined, and they shape how people make living. Societies with rudimentary technology depend on the fluctuations of their environments, while industrialized societies have more control over the impact of their surroundings and thus develop different cultural features. This distinction is so important that sociologists generally classify societies along a spectrum of their level of industrialization--from preindustrial to industrial, and to postindustrial.

Preindustrial Societies

Prior to our "industrial" or "postindustrial" societies, in which we solely rely on technologies and sciences, there were "agricultural" societies preceded by "horticultural and pastoral" societies. The very first type of societies for all humans with no exception was "hunting and gathering" societies. What people do and how they think cannot remain the same when the mode of economy--one of the most significant social conditions--shifts from one to the next.

For hunters and gatherers, indeed, the unit of life was, according to anthropological studies, their tribe as a whole, rather than the individual. They say, for example, "[other members are] myself in another form" (Redfield 1947, p. 301); there was no distinction between "self" and "other" within the tribe. Everybody was a part of a solid collective life. In our own postindustrial societies, by sharp contrast, people claim, "This is MY life, not yours." Each of us lives his/her own individual life.

Hunting and Gathering

By far the longest period of time in humans' past, our ancestors lived in **hunting and gathering** societies based upon kinship and tribes. They solely depended on natural environments, acting almost as a part of the nature. They hunted wild animals and gathered plants for food. When resources became scarce, they moved to a new area to find food. Taking thousands of years, these societies, *each independently*, shifted toward horticultural and pastoral societies (i.e., domestication of plants and animals), but still today a few hundred remain in existence, such as indigenous Australian tribes sometimes referred to as "aborigines," or the Bambuti, a group of pygmy hunter-gatherers residing in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

According to paleoanthropologists, humans are highly "social animals" and have taken this characteristic to new extremes through the development of the language (Johanson et al. 2003). Humans are also "moral animals"; there are many other animals that live in groups, but humans share food extensively with others, while, say, chimps don't. By helping each other within their groups, our ancestors got high chances for survival although,

compared to many other animals, humans are physically not very strong. Think about human kids, for example. When they begin walking, many other animals are becoming parents. Which animals could they beat up? Not so many, of course. Even a squirrel could beat them up easily, no?

Friedrich Engels (2001 [1884]), Karl Marx's intellectual partner, called this ancient social characteristic, in which humans extensively helped each other within their own groups, "the old communism" (p. 63) or **primitive communism**, referring to the collective right to basic resources, egalitarianism in social relationships, and absence of authoritarian rule and hierarchy. There was no personal property and, hence, no social stratification, meaning that all (men and men; men and women; women and women) were equal. The tribe as a whole functioned as a family, and everything (including children) was "OURS." Also, it is important to note that as women bore children, the societal arrangement was **matriarchal**, i.e., female-centered.

Horticultural and Pastoral

The earliest groups of people who began producing food artificially resided in the place we call today the Middle East. They started farming, rudimentary though, about 10,000 years ago, domesticating plants (wheat, peas, seeds...) and animals (pigs, sheep, cattle...). Their societies are called **horticultural and pastoral**. They became able to start permanent settlements. This created more stability and more material goods.

It is important to note that the shift from hunting and gathering societies to horticultural and pastoral societies did not start about the same time among humans. After those in the Middle East, indeed, it took about 1,000 years for people in India and China to start the shift, 5,000 years in Mexico, and 7,000 years in Peru, among others. As mentioned above, furthermore, some societies on this planet have never started it.

Unlike earlier hunter-gatherers who depended entirely on existing resources to stay alive, pastoral groups were able to breed livestock for, other than food, clothing, transportation and farming, and they created a surplus of

goods. After having domesticated animals, however, our ancestors didn't notice for thousands of years(!) that they could consume "milk" from those animals.

Around the time that horticultural and pastoral societies emerged, specialized occupations began to develop, and societies commenced trading with local groups. Under such circumstances, as **personal property** emerged, inequality between men and men and that between men and women began growing. Primitive communism was now disappearing, and the matriarchal societal arrangement was gradually shifting toward **patriarchal**, i.e., male-centered. Things were becoming "MINE, NOT YOURS."

Agricultural

While horticultural and pastoral societies used small, temporary tools such as digging sticks or hoes, agricultural societies relied on permanent tools and more sophisticated systems for farming. Our ancestors, for example, invented the plow to cultivate the land and the irrigation system to water the plants, and used animal power for farming. They learned to rotate the types of crops grown on their fields and to reuse waste products such as fertilizer, which led to better harvests and bigger surpluses of food. The **Agricultural Revolution** made farming not just stable but, maybe more importantly, profitable.

Settlements grew into towns and cities, and particularly bountiful regions became centers of trade and commerce. Some got more personal properties than others. Those who had more resources could afford better living and developed into a class of nobility while the majority suffered from poverty. Social stratification became clearly structured into caste/class systems, and inequalities among people grew worse. Although women helped farming, as their status was practically reduced to their men's "belongings" in such social structures, sexism became a social norm.

The ninth century in Europe gave rise to **feudal** societies. These societies contained a strict hierarchical system of power based around land

ownership and protection. The nobility, known as lords, placed vassals in charge of pieces of land. In return for the resources that the land provided, vassals promised to fight for their lords.

These individual pieces of land, known as fiefdoms, were cultivated by the lower class. In return for maintaining the land, peasants were guaranteed a place to live and protection from outside enemies. Power was handed down through family lines among nobles, with peasant families serving lords for generations and generations. Via the Industrial Revolution, however, the social and economic system of feudalism collapsed and was replaced by capitalism and the technological advances of the industrial era.

Industrial Society

In the eighteenth century, Britain experienced a dramatic rise in technological invention, leading to the event known as the **Industrial Revolution**. What made this period remarkable was the number of new inventions that influenced people's daily lives, most notably, textile machines and steam engine. Textile machines made cotton the major product replacing wool, which was heavier, more expensive, and more difficult to handle than cotton. The steam engine helped transport cotton, together with sugar cane, tobacco, and people, way faster than before.

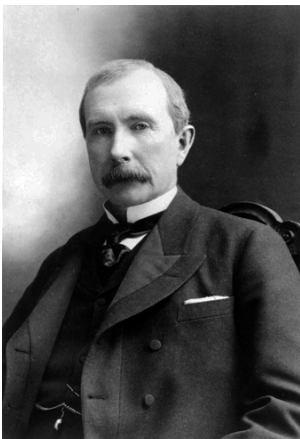
If the starting point of the Industrial Revolution is likened to the boiling point, it is the "triangular trade" that should be likened to the energy of heat. This trade involved three areas, namely, Africa, Europe, and Americas. It was structured as follows: Europe, mostly England, sent manufacturing goods to West Africa in exchange for slaves (in total, more than 3 million) who were sold to Americas, mostly Southern States of what we call today the U.S., in which they produced cotton, sugar cane, and tobacco, which were sold to Europe. After this trade started, it quickly "boiled" up the Industrial Revolution in just 10 years!

One of the results of the Industrial Revolution was the rise of urban centers. Workers flocked to factories for jobs, and the populations of cities became increasingly diverse. Some in the new generation became less preoccupied with maintaining family land and traditions and more focused on acquiring

wealth and achieving upward mobility for themselves and their families. They wanted their children and grandchildren to continue to rise to the top. If this actually happened in the U.S., it was called the "American Dream." As this doesn't happen to the vast majority of people (just like ourselves), the government frantically sells public lotteries so as not to make the "American Dream" a dead language.

It was the Industrial Revolution that, as it were, gave a birth to sociology. Life was changing quickly and the long-established traditions of the agricultural eras did not apply to life in the larger cities. Masses of people were moving to new environments and often found themselves faced with horrendous conditions of filth, overcrowding, and poverty. Social scientists emerged to study the relationship between the individual members of society and their social conditions and locations as a whole.

Power moved from the hands of the aristocracy to business-savvy newcomers who amassed fortunes in their lifetimes, or what Marx called "bourgeoisie." Families such as the Rockefellers and the Vanderbilts became the new power players and used their influence in business to control aspects of government, as well. Eventually, concerns over the exploitation of workers led to the formation of labor unions and laws that set mandatory conditions for employees. Much of our social structure and social ideas--like family, childhood, and time standardization--grew in industrial society.



John D.
Rockefeller,
cofounder of
the Standard
Oil
Company,
came from an
unremarkable
family of
salesmen and
menial
laborers. By
his death at
age 98, he
was worth
\$1.4 billion.
In industrial
societies,
business
owners such
as
Rockefeller
hold the
majority of
the power.
(Photo
courtesy of
Wikimedia
Commons)

Postindustrial Society

Information societies, sometimes known as **postindustrial societies**, are a recent development. Unlike industrial societies that are rooted in the

production of material goods, information societies are based on the production of information and services.

Digital technology is the steam engine of information societies, and computer moguls such as Steve Jobs and Bill Gates are its John D. Rockefellers and Cornelius Vanderbilts. Since the economy of information societies is driven by knowledge and not material goods, power lies with those in charge of storing and distributing information. Members of a postindustrial society are likely to be employed as sellers of services—software programmers or business consultants, for example—instead of producers of goods.

Summary

Societies are classified according to their development and use of technology. For most of human history, people lived in preindustrial societies characterized by limited technology and low production of goods. After the Industrial Revolution, many societies based their economies around mechanized labor, leading to greater profits and a trend toward greater social mobility. At the turn of the new millennium, a new type of society emerged. This postindustrial, or information, society is built on digital technology and nonmaterial goods.

Further Research

The Maasai are a modern pastoral society with an economy largely structured around herds of cattle. Read more about the Maasai people and see pictures of their daily lives here: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/The-Maasai>

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Glossary

agricultural societies

societies that rely on farming as a way of life

feudal societies

societies that operate on a strict hierarchical system of power based around land ownership and protection

horticultural societies

societies based around the cultivation of plants

hunter-gatherer societies

societies that depend on hunting wild animals and gathering uncultivated plants for survival

industrial societies

societies characterized by a reliance on mechanized labor to create material goods

information societies

societies based on the production of nonmaterial goods and services

pastoral societies

societies based around the domestication of animals

society

a group of people who live in a definable community and share the same culture

Theoretical Perspectives on Society

- Describe Durkhiem's functionalist view of society
- Understand the conflict theorist view of society
- Explain Marx's concepts of class and alienation
- Identify how symbolic interactionists understand society



Warren Buffett's ideas about taxation and spending habits of the very wealthy are controversial, particularly since they raise questions about America's embedded system of class structure and social power. The three major sociological paradigms differ

in their
perspectives on
these issues.
(Photo courtesy
of Medill
DC/flickr)

There are three prominent sociological theorists who contributed to the foundation of "sociology" a lot, namely, Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber. They offered their own perspectives on society in ways quite different from each other. They explain what's going on under **modernization**, the process in which the old types of societies are shifting towards the new ones, *endlessly*.

Émile Durkheim and Functionalism

As the founder of functionalism or structural functionalism, Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) offered his own perspectives on society that stressed the necessary interconnectivity of all of its elements. To Durkheim, society (the whole) was greater than the sum of its parts (individuals). Think about a living thing, for example. It's a collection of atoms. Although none of the atoms involved in it has a life, when they get together, a life emerges.

Durkheim asserted that individual behavior was not the same as collective behavior, and called the communal behaviors and attitudes of a society (the whole) the **collective conscience**, an emerged life upon collective behavior. To Durkheim, hence, the key factor in collective conscience was **social solidarity**, or the strength of social ties.

Durkheim likened society to a living organism, in which each organ plays a necessary role in keeping the being alive. Even the socially deviant members of society are necessary, Durkheim argued, as punishments for deviance affirm established cultural values and norms. That is, punishment of a crime reaffirms our moral consciousness. "A crime is a crime because

we condemn it,” Durkheim wrote in 1893. “An act offends the common consciousness not because it is criminal, but it is criminal because it offends that consciousness” (Durkheim 1893). Durkheim called these elements of society “social facts,” which are external of, and coercive to, the individual.

Preindustrial societies, Durkheim explained, were held together by **mechanical solidarity**, a type of social order maintained by the collective conscience of a culture. This solidarity is typical for similar people in small folk villages. They are similar in occupation (farmers), religion (only one religion), and lifestyle (precisely based upon traditional ways). People are tied to each other through kinship and a low division of labor.

In industrial societies, mechanical solidarity was replaced with **organic solidarity**, the social order based around an acceptance of economic and social differences. This solidarity is typical for different people in big urban cities. They engage in different jobs, worship, if any, different religions, and choose a variety of lifestyles of their own. Durkheim likened modern societies to, as aforementioned, a living organism, in which each organ plays different roles. By doing so, the entire body (the society) can maintain its health, and as the body is healthy, each organ (the individual) can survive. This is called "division of labor," whose level is, unlike premodern societies, quite high in modern societies.

While the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity is, in the long run, advantageous for a society, Durkheim noted that it can be a time of chaos and “normlessness.” One of the outcomes of the transition is what he called **anomie**, normlessness. It is a situation in which society no longer has the support of a firm collective conscience. People, while more interdependent to accomplish complex tasks, are also alienated from each other. Anomie is experienced when societies are drastically changing, such as those under modernization, and the level of diversity is becoming extreme, such as that in, maybe, New York.

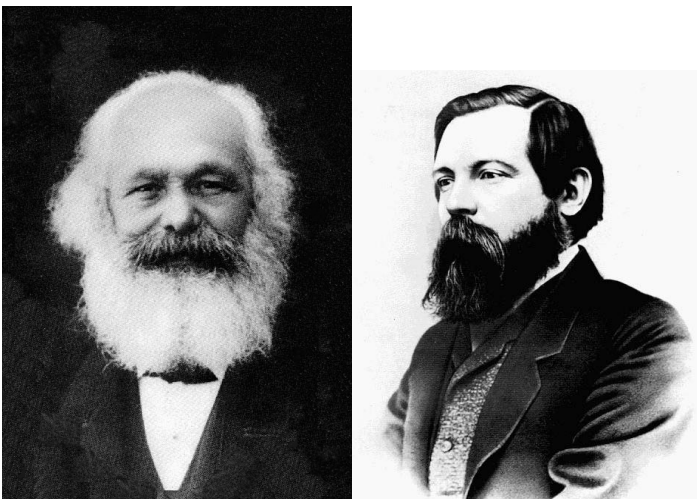
Karl Marx and Conflict Theory

Karl Marx (1818–1883) is certainly among the most significant social thinkers in recent history. While there are many critics of his work, it is still

widely respected and influential. For Marx, society's constructions were predicated upon the idea of "base and superstructure." This term refers to the idea that a society's economic character forms its base, upon which rests the culture and social institutions, the superstructure. For Marx, it is the base (economy) that determines what a society is like.

Marx saw conflict in society as the primary means of change. Economically, he observed conflict going on between the owners of the means of production—the **bourgeoisie**—and the laborers, called the **proletariat**. In the mid-nineteenth century, as industrialization was booming, industrial employers, the "owners of the means of production" in Marx's terms, became more and more exploitative toward the working class. Here is the golden rule of capitalism: the lower the wage, the higher the profit.

Observing the exploitative labor conditions under **capitalism**, Marx and Engels argued that "The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established... new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones (Marx and Engels 2002 [1848]). They bitterly called capitalism "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie."



Karl Marx (left) and Friedrich Engels (right) analyzed differences in social

power between “have” and “have-not” groups. (Photo (a) courtesy of Wikimedia Commons; Photo (b) courtesy of George Lester/Wikimedia Commons)

In preindustrial societies, there was a firm connection between the worker and the product. Farmers planned, and knew, what and how they were producing with other folks. With the bourgeoisie revolution and the rise of capitalism, however, workers themselves are reduced to just a part of the process of production. Marx described modern society in terms of **alienation**, the condition in which workers are isolated and divorced from their work, other workers, the product they make, and hence, the sense of self, and feel as if they became a part of gigantic machines rather than humans. Marx defined four specific types of alienation (you can skip these).

Alienation from the product of one's labor. An industrial worker does not have the opportunity to relate to the product he labors on. Instead of training for years as a watchmaker, an unskilled worker can get a job at a watch factory pressing buttons to seal pieces together. The worker does not care if he is making watches or cars, simply that the job exists. In the same way, a worker may not even know or care what product to which he is contributing. A worker on a Ford assembly line may spend all day installing windows on car doors without ever seeing the rest of the car. A cannery worker can spend a lifetime cleaning fish without ever knowing what product they are used for.

Alienation from the process of one's labor. A worker does not control the conditions of her job because she does not own the means of production. If a person is hired to work in a fast food restaurant, she is expected to make the food the way she is taught. All ingredients must be combined in a particular order and in a particular quantity; there is no room for creativity or change. An employee at Burger King cannot decide to change the spices used on the fries in the same way that an employee on a Ford assembly line

cannot decide to place a car's headlights in a different position. Everything is decided by the bourgeoisie who then dictate orders to the laborers.

Alienation from others. Workers compete, rather than cooperate. Employees vie for time slots, bonuses, and job security. Even when a worker clocks out at night and goes home, the competition does not end. As Marx commented in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), "No sooner is the exploitation of the laborer by the manufacturer, so far at an end, that he receives his wages in cash, than he is set upon by the other portion of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker."

Alienation from one's self. A final outcome of industrialization is a loss of connectivity between a worker and her occupation. Because there is nothing that ties a worker to her labor, there is no longer a sense of self. Instead of being able to take pride in an identity such as being a watchmaker, automobile builder, or chef, a person is simply a cog in the machine.

Taken as a whole, then, alienation in modern society means that an individual has no control over his life. Even in feudal societies, a person controlled the manner of his labor as to when and how it was carried out. But why, then, does the modern working class not rise up and rebel? (Indeed, Marx predicted that this would be the ultimate outcome and collapse of capitalism.)

Marx offered a pair of concepts that describe workers' cognition about their own status, namely, **false consciousness**, or "class in itself," and **class consciousness**, "class for itself." "False consciousness" is a cognition in which the proletariat falsely support ideas or ideologies that can benefit the bourgeoisie rather than themselves. Ideas such as the emphasis of competition over cooperation, for example, support capitalism, in which the proletariat suffer from exploitation and aforementioned alienation. Or some people mistakenly believe that just because they own, say, iPhone X (bought on eBay) necessarily means that they belong to capitalist class.

"Class consciousness" is the awareness of one's rank in society and the readiness to argue for his/her class itself. Only once society entered this state of political consciousness would it be ready for a social change. In the

end of their book *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels urged, "Workers of the world, unite!" (Marx and Engels 2002 [1848])

So "get up, stand up, stand up for your rights. Don't give up the fight!"



An assembly line worker installs car parts with the aid of complex machinery. Has technology made this type of labor more or less alienating? (Photo courtesy of Carol Highsmith/Wikimedia Commons)

Max Weber

While Karl Marx can be seen as standing for working class, Max Weber is often seen as a "sophisticated Marx," or standing for middle class. Like Marx, yet, Weber critically warned that modernization and industrialization would have negative impacts on individuals.

Weber's primary focus on the structure of society lays in the elements of class, status, and power. Similar to Marx, Weber saw class as economically

determined. Society, he believed, was split between owners and laborers. Status, on the other hand, was based on noneconomic factors such as education, kinship, and religion. Both status and class determined an individual's power, or influence over ideas. Unlike Marx, Weber believed that these ideas formed the base of society.

See? He was more sophisticated, right?

Weber's analysis of modern society centered around the concept of **rationalization**. A rational society is one built around logic and efficiency rather than morality or tradition. To Weber, capitalism is entirely rational. Although this leads to efficiency and merit-based success, however, it can have negative effects when taken to the extreme. In some modern societies, this is seen when rigid routines and strict design lead to a mechanized work environment and a focus on producing identical products in every location. Looks like "alienation"?

For Weber, the culmination of industrialization, rationalization, and the like results in what he called the **iron cage**, in which the individual is trapped by institutions and bureaucracy. The idea is similar to Marx's alienation (you can go back to the page you skipped and read it, if you want to).



Cubicles are used to maximize individual workspace in an office. Such

structures may be rational,
but they are also isolating.
(Photo courtesy of Tim
Patterson/flickr)

Summary

Émile Durkheim believed that as societies advance, they make the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity. For Karl Marx, society exists in terms of class conflict. With the rise of capitalism, workers become alienated from themselves and others in society. Sociologist Max Weber noted that the rationalization of society can be taken to unhealthy extremes.

Further Research

One of the most influential pieces of writing in modern history was Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *The Communist Manifesto*. Visit this site to read the original document that spurred revolutions around the world:
<http://openstaxcollege.org/1/Communist-Party>.

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Glossary

alienation

an individual's isolation from his society, his work, and his sense of self

anomie

a situation in which society no longer has the support of a firm collective consciousness

bourgeoisie

the owners of the means of production in a society

capitalism

a way of organizing an economy so that the things that are used to make and transport products (such as land, oil, factories, ships, etc.) are owned by individual people and companies rather than by the government

class consciousness

the awareness of one's rank in society

collective conscience

the communal beliefs, morals, and attitudes of a society

false consciousness

a person's beliefs and ideology that are in conflict with her best interests

iron cage

a situation in which an individual is trapped by social institutions

mechanical solidarity

a type of social order maintained by the collective consciousness of a culture

organic solidarity

a type of social order based around an acceptance of economic and social differences

proletariat

the laborers in a society

rationalization

a belief that modern society should be built around logic and efficiency rather than morality or tradition

social integration

how strongly a person is connected to his or her social group

Social Constructions of Reality

- Understand the sociological concept of reality as a social construct
- Define roles and describe their places in people's daily interactions
- Explain how individuals present themselves and perceive themselves in a social context



Who are we? What role do we play in society? According to symbolic interactionists, we construct reality through our interactions with others. In a way, our day-to-day interactions are like those of actors on a stage. (Photo courtesy of Jan Lewandowski/flickr)

W.I. Thomas's notable **Thomas theorem** states, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas and Thomas 1928). That is, social reality (as opposed to natural reality) stems not necessarily from objective facts, but from socially constructed meanings and images, regardless of if they are factual or just imaginary. Under the Cold War, for example, Americans feared Communism as dangerous (definition), and began suspecting each other to be communists, many of whom as a result lost their jobs (consequence).

Thomas states that our moral codes and social norms are created by “successive definitions of the situation.” Similarly, Robert K. Merton offered **self-fulfilling prophecy**. By this, Merton meant that even a false idea can become true if it is acted upon. Assume, for example, that there is a rumor that a given bank is going bankrupt. What would you do if you keep most of your money in this bank? You'd become crazy, run to this bank, and demand all of your cash! But what if all customers did the same? As banks rarely have that much money on hand, the bank may run out of money, fulfilling the customers' rumor (or prophecy), regardless of if it is factual or just imaginary. The Great Depression of the 1930s, indeed, started this way!



The story line of a self-fulfilling prophecy appears in many literary works, perhaps most famously in the story of Oedipus.

Oedipus is told by an oracle that he will murder his father and marry his mother. In going out of his way to avoid his fate, Oedipus inadvertently fulfills it.

Oedipus's story illustrates one way in which members of society contribute to the social construction of reality.

(Photo courtesy of Jean-Antoine-Theodore Giroust/Wikimedia Commons)

Structure, Statuses, and Roles



Buildings have their own "structures," which may consist of the walls, the roof, the doors, the windows, the floors, and so forth. These parts can be considered "statuses" of a structure that are assigned their own "roles" to play.

Likewise, each society has its own **structure**. To make things simple, take the family shown above as a small-size society, for example. This family structure consists of the 4 members (excluding the dog and the cat), namely, dad, mom, the daughter, and the son, which we call the **statuses** of this family. To each of these statuses, its own **roles** are assigned to play.

The father acts as the father to his children, and so does the mother. The daughter acts to her parents as the daughter, and so does the son.

Notice, the man called the father above is not the father to his wife; he is the husband to her. Likewise, the woman called the mother is the wife to her

husband. Then, think about this: What is the girl called the daughter to the boy called the son? They are, in such relations, the sister and the brother to each other. This means that each one of them (and ourselves) has multiple statuses, depending on the situation, or the type of societies he/she belongs to.

In fact, the father may be an assistant manager in his workplace. He may not act to his boss or his customers in a manner in which he talks to his son home. Likewise, when the children go to school, their statuses are students to their teachers and friends to their classmates, needless to say, not the daughter or the son. Accordingly, they interact with others.

In short, what they (and we) are doing in a given situation is play their (our) own **roles** assigned to their (our) **statuses** in a given social **structure**. So if we get the information about people's statuses in a given social structure, we can predict, to a great extent, how they interact with each other. Think about the way, for example, the professor of your sociology course acts to the chairperson of the department, or to his wife. Could that be the same as he does to his students, or to his son? Think about it...

There are two different types of **statuses**. One is **ascribed statuses** and the other, **achieved statuses**. Examples of ascribed statuses include race/ethnicity, gender, and so on. They are "given" to us. Those of achieved statuses are college degrees, any kinds of license, and so on. They are "gotten" by ourselves.

It's not easy to draw a clear boundary between ascribed statuses and achieved statuses, sometimes. Take religion, for example. It can be considered ascribed, if we follow our parents' religion. It can be an achieved status, however, if we convert from one religion to another. Or nationality is usually an ascribed status, but for many immigrants, the U.S. citizenship is an achieved status.

Summary

Society is based on the social construction of reality. How we define society influences how society actually is. Likewise, how we see other people

influences their actions as well as our actions toward them. We all take on various roles throughout our lives, and our social interactions depend on what types of roles we assume, who we assume them with, and the scene where interaction takes place.

Further Research

TV Tropes is a website where users identify concepts that are commonly used in literature, film, and other media. Although its tone is for the most part humorous, the site provides a good jumping-off point for research. Browse the list of examples under the entry of “self-fulfilling prophecy.” Pay careful attention to the real-life examples. Are there ones that surprised you or that you don’t agree with? <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/tv-tropes>

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Glossary

achieved status

the status a person chooses, such as a level of education or income

ascribed status

the status outside of an individual’s control, such as sex or race

habitualization

the idea that society is constructed by us and those before us, and it is followed like a habit

institutionalization

the act of implanting a convention or norm into society

looking-glass self

our reflection of how we think we appear to others

roles

patterns of behavior that are representative of a person's social status

role-set

an array of roles attached to a particular status

role conflict

a situation when one or more of an individual's roles clash

role performance

the expression of a role

role strain

stress that occurs when too much is required of a single role

self-fulfilling prophecy

an idea that becomes true when acted upon

status

the responsibilities and benefits that a person experiences according to his or her rank and role in society

Thomas theorem

how a subjective reality can drive events to develop in accordance with that reality, despite being originally unsupported by objective reality

Introduction to Socialization

class="introduction"

Socialization is the process in which we learn the norms and values of our society from our earliest family and play experiences. (Photo courtesy of woodleywonderworks/flickr)



Socialization is defined as “the process by which we learn the ways of a given society or social group so that we can function within it” (Elkin and Handel 1989). To be a little more specific, "the ways" mean norms (rules for appropriate behaviors) and values (attitudes toward what is important and what is not) particular to our society, and "can function" means to be able to act as our society's members. Through socialization, hence, our social orientation becomes imbued with our own particular societal "color."

Prior to the process of socialization, that is, when we were new-born babies, we don't differ from each other. Italian babies, for example, don't differ from, say, Chinese babies in their behaviors. When they are happy, indeed, they smile or laugh almost in the same way; conversely, when they are unhappy, they cry almost in the same way. Through the process of socialization, however, children raised in Italian families are becoming, more or less, "Italian" and those in Chinese families, "Chinese"--although some factors other than ethnicity (especially, social class) can make a variance in this process and, hence, in its consequences.

In the following sections, we will examine the importance of the complex process of socialization and how it takes place through interaction with many individuals, groups, and social institutions. We will explore how socialization is critical to children as they develop as well as how it is a lifelong process through which we become prepared for new social environments and expectations in every stage of our lives.

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Glossary

socialization

the process wherein people come to understand societal norms and expectations, to accept society's beliefs, and to be aware of societal values

Theories of Self-Development

- Understand the difference between psychological and sociological theories of self-development
- Explain the process of moral development

When we are born, we have a genetic makeup and biological traits. However, who we are as human beings, or our own "self," develops through social interaction. Many scholars, both in the fields of psychology and in sociology, have described the process of self-development as a precursor to understanding how that “self” is socialized.

Psychological Perspectives on Self-Development

Sigmund Freud

Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was one of the most influential modern scientists to put forth a theory about how people develop a sense of self. He believed that personality and sexual development were closely linked through the maturation process called **psychosexual development**. It follows the 5 major stages: oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital (see below). Freud's (2000 [1904]) ideas about these stages are based on such developmental events as, respectively, breastfeeding, toilet training, and the growth of sexual awareness.

Stage	Age	Characteristics
Oral	0-1	Mouth-sucking
Anal	1-3	Anus-withholding/expelling poo-poo
Phallic	3-5	Touching one's own genitals
Latent	5-15	Most sexual impulses repressed, sublimated to something else
Genital	15+	Sexual experimentation with another person

The Psychosexual Stages by Sigmund Freud.

According to Freud, failure to properly engage in, or disengage from, a specific stage results in emotional and psychological consequences in adult. A person with an oral fixation may indulge in over-eating or over-drinking. An anal fixation may produce a neat freak, called “anal retentive.” A person stuck in the phallic stage may be promiscuous and/or emotionally immature. Although no solid empirical evidence supports Freud’s theory, his ideas continue to contribute to the work of scholars in a variety of disciplines.

Erik Erikson

Psychologist Erik Erikson (1902–1994) constructed a theory of **life course** with which to depict personality development that, according to him, lasts throughout an entire lifetime. It is structured with the eight stages (see below). Erikson suggested that we continuously face eight issues one by one through these stages, all of which are related to our relationships to others, such as parents, family, peers, partners, workmates, and so on. Notice that in contrast to Freud’s theory of psychosexual development based on basic human urges, Erikson’s theory of life course focuses on more social needs (Erikson 1982).

Stage	Age	Psychosocial Crisis	Significant Other(s)
1	Infant	Trust/mistrust	Mother
2	Toddler	Autonomy/shame	Parents
3	Preschooler	Initiative/guilt	Family
4	School-age	Industry/inferiority	Peer
5	Adolescence	Identity/role confusion	Peer/role models
6	Young adult	Intimacy/isolation	Partners/friends
7	Middle adult	Generativity/stagnation	Household/workmates
8	Old adult	Ego integrity/despair	One's own self looked back

The Eight Stages in Life Course by Erik Erikson.

Jean Piaget

Jean Piaget (1896–1980) initiated the psychology of **cognitive development**, focusing specifically on the age and maturity of children. Through years of face-to-face interviews with many children, he observed that the perception of the world by children changes stage by stage as their cognitive abilities mature. In other words, Piaget believed, the development of self evolves through a negotiation between the world as it exists in the child’s mind and the world that exists as it is experienced socially (Piaget 1954).

Piaget offered four stages of cognitive development which reflect the increasing sophistication of children's thought as they physically grow (Piaget et al. 2000 [1966]). His four stages include: 1. sensori-motor, 2. pre-operatory, 3. concrete operatory, and 4. formal operatory (see below).

Stage	Age	Methods to View/Handle the Reality
Sensori-motor	0-2	Bodily senses with no language or symbols; total egocentrism
Pre-operatory	2-7	Language/symbols; more “decentered” ego
Concrete operatory	7-11	Decentered ego; more social interactions; rules/group actions
Formal operatory	11+	Abstract concepts; conditional (if-then) statements; classifications

The Four Stages of Cognitive Development by Jean Piaget.

In the sensori-motor stage, children are egocentric (self-centered on the personal level) and assume that other people see, hear, and feel exactly the same as they do. “I love my mom, and all other people love my mom.” In the pre-operatory stage, children become less egocentric and enjoy “playing house” (taking the role of others) games. In the concrete operatory stage, children understand rules of games to play with other kids but still have difficulty in understanding things/ideas that they don’t

tangibly see/hear/feel. In the formal operatory stage, children understand abstract concepts, conditional statements, and classifications. To be more specific, they (some of them) become able to read/draw a map, to think about "if, then," and to see the difference between, say, racism and discrimination. So, which stage do you think you are currently in? Oops, sorry...

Sociological Theories of Self-Development

Charles Cooley

One of the pioneering contributors to sociological perspectives was Charles Cooley (1864–1929). He asserted that people's self understanding is constructed by their perception of how others view them—a process termed “the **looking-glass self**” (Cooley 1902), i.e., the self reflected in the other. Just as we set our hairstyle in front of the mirror, that is, we monitor our "self" through reactions of others to us (the mirror) with whom we interact.

When their reactions are positive, we happily confirm that we are on the right track; conversely, when they seem negative, we sadly notice that something is wrong and has to be altered. Some are good at doing this and are confident in their "self" while others may be clumsy in noticing what's wrong and have difficulty in being much confident in their "self."

George Herbert Mead

Another giant contributor to the self-development is George Herbert Mead (1863–1931). He studied the **self** as a person's distinct identity that is developed through, and *only through*, social interactions. This means that without interactions with others, the self is not possible to emerge, which means that without the society, the self is a "forget-about-it" thing. In order to engage in social interactions to grow the “self,” an individual has to be able to view him/herself through the eyes of others. That's not an ability that we are born with (Mead 1934). The self is, hence, not an inborn trait; when we were born, we didn't have it. Through socialization, we learn to put ourselves in someone else's shoes and look at the world through their perspectives. Somewhat similar to Cooley above? You bet!

What is the process through which newborns are becoming individuals with “self”? Mead believed that there are 3 stages of development that all of us go through, namely, (1) imitation, (2) play, and (3) team game. During the preparatory stage, children are only capable of "imitation": they have no ability to imagine how others see things. By imitating what people surrounding themselves do and say, they learn how to eat food, how to communicate with others, and so on.

This is followed by the "play stage," during which children begin to take on the role of others. Thus, they might try on a parent's point of view by acting out grownup behavior, like acting out the mom or dad role, or talking on a toy telephone the way they see their parents do. In this stage, people with whom children *directly* interact are called **significant others**. They include, basically, parents and, if any, sibling(s).

During the "team-game" stage, children learn to take several roles at a given time and how those roles interact with each other. They learn to understand interactions involving different people with a variety of purposes. An example offered by G. H. Mead himself is a baseball game. It's a complicated game, in which everybody is playing different roles, such as the pitcher, the catcher, the batter, the first-base player... The players need to know what to do in a given situation. It's a game for grownups.

During this stage, children gradually grab *abstract* ideas about what people do in the "wider society," which Mead called the **generalized other**. Not just do they place themselves in their own "self," but now they can connect themselves to the wider society and view themselves as if they have others' wider eyes (Mead 1934; Mead 1964; paraphrased). The third-base fielder in a baseball game, for example, knows where to throw the ball he's just caught, viewing himself as if the coach is viewing him. Or when a family is taking a trip, a daughter (a grownup girl) minds the flight schedule rather than a new toy she's just got.

Summary

Psychological theories of self-development have been broadened by sociologists who explicitly study the role of society and social interaction in self-development. Charles Cooley and George Mead both contributed significantly to the sociological understanding of the development of self. Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan developed their ideas further and researched how our sense of morality develops. Gilligan added the dimension of gender differences to Kohlberg's theory.

Further Research

Lawrence Kohlberg was most famous for his research using moral dilemmas. He presented dilemmas to boys and asked them how they would judge the situations. Visit <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Dilemma> to read about Kohlberg's most famous moral dilemma, known as the Heinz dilemma.

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Glossary

generalized other

the common behavioral expectations of general society

moral development

the way people learn what is “good” and “bad” in society

self

a person’s distinct sense of identity as developed through social interaction

Why Socialization Matters

- Understand the importance of socialization both for individuals and society
- Explain the nature versus nurture debate

Socialization is critical both to individuals and to the societies in which they live. It illustrates how completely intertwined human beings and their social worlds are. First, it is through teaching culture to new members that a society perpetuates itself. If new generations of a society don't learn its way of life, it ceases to exist. Whatever is distinctive about a culture must be transmitted to those who join it in order for a society to survive. For U.S. culture to continue, for example, children in the United States must learn about cultural values related to democracy: they have to learn the norms of voting, as well as how to use material objects such as voting machines. Of course, some would argue that it's just as important in U.S. culture for the younger generation to learn the etiquette of eating in a restaurant or the rituals of tailgate parties at football games. In fact, there are many ideas and objects that people in the United States teach children about in hopes of keeping the society's way of life going through another generation.



Socialization teaches us our society's expectations for dining out. The manners and customs of different cultures (When can you use your hands to eat? How should you compliment the cook? Who is the "head" of the table?) are learned through

socialization. (Photo courtesy of
Niyam Bhushan/flickr)

Socialization is just as essential to us as individuals. Social interaction provides the means via which we gradually become able to see ourselves through the eyes of others, and how we learn who we are and how we fit into the world around us. In addition, to function successfully in society, we have to learn the basics of both material and nonmaterial culture, everything from how to dress ourselves to what's suitable attire for a specific occasion; from when we sleep to what we sleep on; and from what's considered appropriate to eat for dinner to how to use the stove to prepare it. Most importantly, we have to learn language—whether it's the dominant language or one common in a subculture, whether it's verbal or through signs—in order to communicate and to think. As we saw with Danielle, without socialization we literally have no self.

Nature versus Nurture

Some experts assert that who we are is a result of **nurture**—the relationships and caring that surround us. Others argue that who we are is based entirely in genetics. According to this belief, our temperaments, interests, and talents are set before birth. From this perspective, then, who we are depends on **nature**.

One way researchers attempt to measure the impact of nature is by studying twins. Some studies have followed identical twins who were raised separately. The pairs shared the same genetics but in some cases were socialized in different ways. Instances of this type of situation are rare, but studying the degree to which identical twins raised apart are the same and different can give researchers insight into the way our temperaments, preferences, and abilities are shaped by our genetic makeup versus our social environment.

For example, in 1968, twin girls born to a mentally ill mother were put up for adoption, separated from each other, and raised in different households.

The adoptive parents, and certainly the babies, did not realize the girls were one of five pairs of twins who were made subjects of a scientific study (Flam 2007).

In 2003, the two women, then age thirty-five, were reunited. Elyse Schein and Paula Bernstein sat together in awe, feeling like they were looking into a mirror. Not only did they look alike but they also behaved alike, using the same hand gestures and facial expressions (Spratling 2007). Studies like these point to the genetic roots of our temperament and behavior.

Though genetics and hormones play an important role in human behavior, sociology's larger concern is the effect society has on human behavior, the "nurture" side of the nature versus nurture debate. What race were the twins? From what social class were their parents? What about gender? Religion? All these factors affected the lives of the twins as much as their genetic makeup and are critical to consider as we look at life through the sociological lens.

Note:

The Life of Chris Langan, the Smartest Man You've Never Heard Of Bouncer. Firefighter. Factory worker. Cowboy. Chris Langan spent the majority of his adult life just getting by with jobs like these. He had no college degree, few resources, and a past filled with much disappointment. Chris Langan also had an IQ of over 195, nearly 100 points higher than the average person (Brabham 2001). So why didn't Chris become a neurosurgeon, professor, or aeronautical engineer? According to Malcolm Gladwell (2008) in his book *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Chris didn't possess the set of social skills necessary to succeed on such a high level—skills that aren't innate but learned.

Gladwell looked to a recent study conducted by sociologist Annette Lareau in which she closely shadowed 12 families from various economic backgrounds and examined their parenting techniques. Parents from lower income families followed a strategy of "accomplishment of natural growth," which is to say they let their children develop on their own with a large amount of independence; parents from higher-income families, however, "actively fostered and accessed a child's talents, opinions, and

skills” (Gladwell 2008). These parents were more likely to engage in analytical conversation, encourage active questioning of the establishment, and foster development of negotiation skills. The parents were also able to introduce their children to a wide range of activities, from sports to music to accelerated academic programs. When one middle-class child was denied entry to a gifted and talented program, the mother petitioned the school and arranged additional testing until her daughter was admitted. Lower-income parents, however, were more likely to unquestioningly obey authorities such as school boards. Their children were not being socialized to comfortably confront the system and speak up (Gladwell 2008).

What does this have to do with Chris Langan, deemed by some the smartest man in the world (Brabham 2001)? Chris was born in severe poverty, moving across the country with an abusive and alcoholic stepfather. His genius went largely unnoticed. After accepting a full scholarship to Reed College, he lost his funding after his mother failed to fill out necessary paperwork. Unable to successfully make his case to the administration, Chris, who had received straight A’s the previous semester, was given F’s on his transcript and forced to drop out. After he enrolled in Montana State, an administrator’s refusal to rearrange his class schedule left him unable to find the means necessary to travel the 16 miles to attend classes. What Chris had in brilliance, he lacked in practical intelligence, or what psychologist Robert Sternberg defines as “knowing what to say to whom, knowing when to say it, and knowing how to say it for maximum effect” (Sternberg et al. 2000). Such knowledge was never part of his socialization.

Chris gave up on school and began working an array of blue-collar jobs, pursuing his intellectual interests on the side. Though he’s recently garnered attention for his “Cognitive Theoretic Model of the Universe,” he remains weary of and resistant to the educational system.

As Gladwell concluded, “He’d had to make his way alone, and no one—not rock stars, not professional athletes, not software billionaires, and not even geniuses—ever makes it alone” (2008).



Identical twins may look alike, but their differences can give us clues to the effects of socialization.
(Photo courtesy of D. Flam/flickr)

Sociologists all recognize the importance of socialization for healthy individual and societal development. But how do scholars working in the three major theoretical paradigms approach this topic? Structural functionalists would say that socialization is essential to society, both because it trains members to operate successfully within it and because it perpetuates culture by transmitting it to new generations. Without socialization, a society's culture would perish as members died off. A conflict theorist might argue that socialization reproduces inequality from generation to generation by conveying different expectations and norms to those with different social characteristics. For example, individuals are socialized differently by gender, social class, and race. As in Chris Langan's case, this creates different (unequal) opportunities. An interactionist

studying socialization is concerned with face-to-face exchanges and symbolic communication. For example, dressing baby boys in blue and baby girls in pink is one small way we convey messages about differences in gender roles.

Summary

Socialization is important because it helps uphold societies and cultures; it is also a key part of individual development. Research demonstrates that who we are is affected by both nature (our genetic and hormonal makeup) and nurture (the social environment in which we are raised). Sociology is most concerned with the way that society's influence affects our behavior patterns, made clear by the way behavior varies across class and gender.

Further Research

Learn more about five other sets of twins who grew up apart and discovered each other later in life at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/twins>

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Glossary

nature

the influence of our genetic makeup on self-development

nurture

the role that our social environment plays in self-development

Agents of Socialization

- Learn the roles of families and peer groups in socialization
- Understand how we are socialized through formal institutions like schools, workplaces, and the government

Socialization helps people learn to function in their social worlds. How does the process of socialization occur? How do we learn to use the objects of our society's material culture? How do we come to adopt values and norms that represent its nonmaterial culture? This learning takes place through interactions with various agents of socialization, like peer groups and families, plus both formal and informal social institutions.

Social Group Agents

Social groups provide the first experiences of socialization. Families, and later peer groups, communicate expectations and reinforce norms. People first learn to use the tangible objects of material culture in these settings, and then are introduced to abstract ideas shared in the society, such as values and norms.

Family

Family is, usually, the first agent of socialization. Mothers and fathers, siblings and grandparents, plus members of an extended family, if any, all teach a child what he/she needs to know. For example, they show the child how to use objects (such as spoons and forks); how to relate to others (family members, friends, or neighbors); and how the world works through Pokémon, SpongeBob, and the like. As you are aware, either from your own experience as a child or from your role in helping raise one, socialization includes teaching and learning about an unending array of objects and ideas.

Keep in mind, however, that families do not socialize children in a vacuum. Many social factors affect the way a family raises its children. For example, we can use sociological imagination to recognize that individual behaviors

are affected by the historical period in which they take place. Sixty years ago, it would not have been considered especially strict for a father to hit his son with a wooden spoon or a belt if he misbehaved, but today that same action might be considered child abuse.

Sociologists recognize that race, social class, religion, and other societal factors play an important role in socialization. For example, lower-class families tend to emphasize obedience and conformity, while middle-class families emphasize judgment and creativity (National Opinion Research Center 2008). This may occur because lower-class parents have less education and more repetitive-task jobs for which it is helpful to be able to follow rules and conform. Middle-class parents tend to have better education and often work in managerial positions or careers that require creative problem solving, so they teach their children behaviors that are beneficial in these positions. This means that children are effectively socialized and raised to take the types of jobs their parents already have, thus reproducing the class system (Kohn 1977).



The socialized roles of dads
(and moms) vary by society.
(Photo courtesy of Nate
Grigg/flickr)

Peer Groups

A **peer group** is made up of people who are similar in age. Peer group socialization begins in the earliest years, such as when kids on a playground teach younger children the norms about taking turns, the rules of a game, or how to shoot a basketball. Peer groups are important to adolescents in a new way, as they begin to develop an identity separate from their parents and exert independence. The youth tend to get the knowledge about exciting matters (such as sex) and cool things (marijuana) more from their peers than from their parents. Among other pressures, peer pressure is the strongest. Hence, when teenagers are in their peer group, even the nicest ones behave in awful ways (Redl 1966, p. 365). Most delinquent activities initiate in peer groups. ("Conformity pressure" will be discussed in Ch. 6, Groups and Organization.)

Institutional Agents

The social institutions of our culture also inform our socialization. Formal institutions—like schools—teach people how to behave in and navigate these systems. Other institutions, like the media, contribute to socialization by inundating us with messages about norms and expectations.

School

Most U.S. children spend about seven hours a day, 180 days a year, in school, which makes it hard to deny the importance school has on their socialization (U.S. Department of Education 2004). Students are not in school only to study math, reading, science, and other subjects—the manifest function of this system. Schools also serve a latent function in society by socializing children into behaviors like practicing teamwork, following a schedule, and using textbooks.



These
kindergarteners
aren't just
learning to read
and write; they
are being
socialized to
norms like
keeping their
hands to
themselves,
standing in line,
and reciting the
Pledge of
Allegiance.
(Photo courtesy
of Bonner
Springs
Library/flickr)

School and classroom rituals, led by teachers serving as role models and leaders, regularly reinforce what society expects from children. Sociologists describe this aspect of schools as the **hidden curriculum**, the informal teaching done by schools.

Schools also socialize children by teaching them about citizenship and national pride. In the United States, children are taught to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Most districts require classes about U.S. history and geography. As academic understanding of history evolves, textbooks in the United States have been scrutinized and revised to update attitudes toward other cultures as well as perspectives on historical events; thus, children are socialized to a different national or world history than earlier textbooks may have done. For example, information about the mistreatment of African Americans and Native American Indians more accurately reflects those events than in textbooks of the past.

Mass Media

Mass media distribute impersonal information to a wide audience, via television, newspapers, magazines, radio, and the Internet. With the average person spending over four hours a day in front of the television (and children averaging even more screen time), media greatly influence social norms (Roberts, Foehr, and Rideout 2005). People learn about objects of material culture (like new technology and transportation options), as well as nonmaterial culture—values and norms.

Summary

Our direct interactions with social groups, like families and peers, teach us how others expect us to behave. Likewise, a society's formal and informal institutions socialize its population. Schools, workplaces, and the media communicate and reinforce cultural norms and values.

Further Research

Most societies expect parents to socialize children into gender norms. See the controversy surrounding one Canadian couple's refusal to do so at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Baby-Storm>

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Glossary

hidden curriculum

the informal teaching done in schools that socializes children to societal norms

peer group

a group made up of people who are similar in age and social status and who share interests

Socialization Across the Life Course

- Explain how socialization occurs and recurs throughout life
- Understand how people are socialized into new roles at age-related transition points
- Describe when and how resocialization occurs

Socialization isn't a one-time or even a short-term event. We aren't "stamped" by some socialization machine as we move along a conveyor belt and thereby socialized once and for all. In fact, socialization is a lifelong process.

In the United States, socialization throughout the life course is determined greatly by age norms and "time-related rules and regulations" (Setterson 2002). As we grow older, we encounter age-related transition points that require socialization into a new role, such as becoming school age, entering the workforce, or retiring. For example, the U.S. government mandates that all children attend school. Child labor laws, enacted in the early twentieth century, nationally declared that childhood be a time of learning, not of labor. In countries such as Niger and Sierra Leone, however, child labor remains common and socially acceptable, with little legislation to regulate such practices (UNICEF 2012).

Note:

Gap Year: How Different Societies Socialize Young Adults



Age transition points require socialization into new roles that can vary widely between societies. Young adults in America are encouraged to enter college or the workforce right away, students in England and India can take a year off like British Princes William and Harry did, while young men in Singapore and Switzerland must serve time in the military. (Photo courtesy of Charles McCain/flickr)

Have you ever heard of gap year? It's a common custom in British society. When teens finish their secondary schooling (aka high school in the United States), they often take a year "off" before entering college. Frequently, they might take a job, travel, or find other ways to experience another culture. Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge, spent his gap year practicing survival skills in Belize, teaching English in Chile, and working on a dairy farm in the United Kingdom (Prince of Wales 2012a). His brother, Prince Harry, advocated for AIDS orphans in Africa and worked as a jackaroo (a novice ranch hand) in Australia (Prince of Wales 2012b). In the United States, this life transition point is socialized quite differently, and taking a year off is generally frowned upon. Instead, U.S. youth are encouraged to pick career paths by their mid-teens, to select a college and a major by their late teens, and to have completed all collegiate schooling or technical training for their career by their early twenties.

In yet other nations, this phase of the life course is tied into conscription, a term that describes compulsory military service. Egypt, Switzerland, Turkey, and Singapore all have this system in place. Youth in these nations (often only the males) are expected to undergo a number of months or years of military training and service.

How might your life be different if you lived in one of these other countries? Can you think of similar social norms—related to life age-transition points—that vary from country to country?

Many of life's social expectations are made clear and enforced on a cultural level. Through interacting with others and watching others interact, the expectation to fulfill roles becomes clear. While in elementary or middle school, the prospect of having a boyfriend or girlfriend may have been considered undesirable. The socialization that takes place in high school changes the expectation. By observing the excitement and importance attached to dating and relationships within the high school social scene, it quickly becomes apparent that one is now expected not only to be a child and a student, but also a significant other. Graduation from formal education—high school, vocational school, or college—involves socialization into a new set of expectations.

Educational expectations vary not only from culture to culture, but also from class to class. While middle- or upper-class families may expect their daughter or son to attend a four-year university after graduating from high school, other families may expect their child to immediately begin working full-time, as many within their family have done before.

Note:

The Long Road to Adulthood for Millennials

2008 was a year of financial upheaval in the United States. Rampant foreclosures and bank failures set off a chain of events sparking government distrust, loan defaults, and large-scale unemployment. How has this affected the United States's young adults?

Millennials, sometimes also called Gen Y, is a term that describes the generation born during the early eighties to early nineties. While the recession was in full swing, many were in the process of entering, attending, or graduating from high school and college. With employment prospects at historical lows, large numbers of graduates were unable to find work, sometimes moving back in with their parents and struggling to pay back student loans.

According to the *New York Times*, this economic stall is causing the Millennials to postpone what most Americans consider to be adulthood: “The traditional cycle seems to have gone off course, as young people remain untethered to romantic partners or to permanent homes, going back to school for lack of better options, traveling, avoiding commitments, competing ferociously for unpaid internships or temporary (and often grueling) Teach for America jobs, forestalling the beginning of adult life” (Henig 2010). The term Boomerang Generation describes recent college graduates, for whom lack of adequate employment upon college graduation often leads to a return to the parental home (Davidson, 2014).

The five milestones that define adulthood, Henig writes, are “completing school, leaving home, becoming financially independent, marrying, and having a child” (Henig 2010). These social milestones are taking longer for Millennials to attain, if they’re attained at all. Sociologists wonder what long-term impact this generation’s situation may have on society as a whole.

In the process of socialization, adulthood brings a new set of challenges and expectations, as well as new roles to fill. As the aging process moves forward, social roles continue to evolve. Pleasures of youth, such as wild nights out and serial dating, become less acceptable in the eyes of society. Responsibility and commitment are emphasized as pillars of adulthood, and men and women are expected to “settle down.” During this period, many people enter into marriage or a civil union, bring children into their families, and focus on a career path. They become partners or parents instead of students or significant others.

Just as young children pretend to be doctors or lawyers, play house, and dress up, adults also engage in **anticipatory socialization**, the preparation for future life roles. Examples would include a couple who cohabitate before marriage or soon-to-be parents who read infant care books and prepare their home for the new arrival. As part of anticipatory socialization, adults who are financially able begin planning for their retirement, saving money, and looking into future healthcare options. The transition into any new life role, despite the social structure that supports it, can be difficult.

Resocialization

In the process of **resocialization**, old behaviors that were helpful in a previous role are removed because they are no longer of use. Resocialization is necessary when a person moves to a senior care center, goes to boarding school, or serves time in jail. In the new environment, the old rules no longer apply. The process of resocialization is typically more stressful than normal socialization because people have to unlearn behaviors that have become customary to them.

The most common way resocialization occurs is in a total institution where people are isolated from society and are forced to follow someone else's rules. A ship at sea is a total institution, as are religious convents, prisons, or some cult organizations. They are places cut off from a larger society. The 6.9 million Americans who lived in prisons and penitentiaries at the end of 2012 are also members of this type of institution (U.S. Department of Justice 2012). As another example, every branch of the military is a total institution.

Many individuals are resocialized into an institution through a two-part process. First, members entering an institution must leave behind their old identity through what is known as a degradation ceremony. In a **degradation ceremony**, new members lose the aspects of their old identity and are given new identities. The process is sometimes gentle. To enter a senior care home, an elderly person often must leave a family home and give up many belongings which were part of his or her long-standing identity. Though caretakers guide the elderly compassionately, the process

can still be one of loss. In many cults, this process is also gentle and happens in an environment of support and caring.

In other situations, the degradation ceremony can be more extreme. New prisoners lose freedom, rights (including the right to privacy), and personal belongings. When entering the army, soldiers have their hair cut short. Their old clothes are removed, and they wear matching uniforms. These individuals must give up any markers of their former identity in order to be resocialized into an identity as a “soldier.”



In basic training, members of the Air Force are taught to walk, move, and look like each other. (Photo courtesy of Staff Sergeant Desiree N. Palacios, U.S. Air Force/Wikimedia Commons)

After new members of an institution are stripped of their old identity, they build a new one that matches the new society. In the military, soldiers go through basic training together, where they learn new rules and bond with one another. They follow structured schedules set by their leaders. Soldiers must keep their areas clean for inspection, learn to march in correct formations, and salute when in the presence of superiors.

Learning to deal with life after having lived in a total institution requires yet another process of resocialization. In the U.S. military, soldiers learn discipline and a capacity for hard work. They set aside personal goals to achieve a mission, and they take pride in the accomplishments of their units. Many soldiers who leave the military transition these skills into excellent careers. Others find themselves lost upon leaving, uncertain about the outside world and what to do next. The process of resocialization to civilian life is not a simple one.

Summary

Socialization is a lifelong process that reoccurs as we enter new phases of life, such as adulthood or senior age. Resocialization is a process that removes the socialization we have developed over time and replaces it with newly learned rules and roles. Because it involves removing old habits that have been built up, resocialization can be a stressful and difficult process.

Further Research

Homelessness is an endemic problem among veterans. Many soldiers leave the military or return from war and have difficulty resocializing into civilian life. Learn more about this problem at <http://openstaxcollege.org/1/Veteran-Homelessness> or <http://openstaxcollege.org/1/NCHV>

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Glossary

anticipatory socialization

the way we prepare for future life roles

degradation ceremony

the process by which new members of a total institution lose aspects of their old identities and are given new ones

resocialization

the process by which old behaviors are removed and new behaviors are learned in their place

Introduction to Groups and Organizations

class="introduction"

Over the past decade, a grassroots effort to raise awareness of certain political issues has gained in popularity. As a result, Tea Party groups have popped up in nearly every community across the country. The followers of the Tea Party have charged themselves with calling “awareness to any issue which challenges the security, sovereignty, or domestic tranquility of our beloved nation, the United States of America” (Tea Party, Inc. 2014). The group takes its name from the famous so-called Tea Party that occurred in Boston Harbor in 1773. Its membership includes people from all walks of life who are taking a stand to protect their values and beliefs. Their beliefs tend to be anti-tax, anti-big government, pro-gun, and generally politically conservative.

Tea Party politicians have been elected to several offices at the national, state, and local levels. In fact, Alabama, California, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Ohio, and Texas all had pro-Tea Party members win seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate. On the national stage, Tea Partiers are actively seeking the impeachment of President Barrack Obama for what they refer to “flagrant violations,” including forcing national healthcare (Obamacare) on the country, gun grabbing, and failing to protect victims of the terror attack on U.S. diplomatic offices in Benghazi, Libya, on September 11, 2012.

At the local level, Tea Party supporters have taken roles as mayors, county commissioners, city council members, and the like. In a small, rural, Midwestern county with a population of roughly 160,000, the three county commissioners who oversee the operation and administration of county government were two Republicans and a Democrat for years. During the 2012 election, the Democrat lost his seat to an outspoken Tea Party Republican who campaigned as pro-gun and fiscally conservative. He vowed to reduce government spending and shrink the size of county government.

The
national
tour of the

Tea Party
Express
visited
Minnesota
and held a
rally
outside the
state
capitol
building.
(Photo
courtesy of
Fibonacci
Blue/flickr
)



Groups like political parties are prevalent in our lives and provide a significant way we understand and define ourselves—both groups we feel a connection to and those we don't. Groups also play an important role in society. As enduring social units, they help foster shared value systems and are key to the structure of society as we know it. There are three primary sociological perspectives for studying groups: Functionalist, Conflict, and Interactionist. We can look at the Tea Party movement through the lenses of these methods to better understand the roles and challenges that groups offer.

The Functionalist Perspective

The Functionalist perspective is a big-picture, macro-level view that looks at how different aspects of society are intertwined. This perspective is based on the idea that society is a well-balanced system with all parts necessary to the whole, and it studies the roles these parts play in relation to the whole. In the case of the Tea Party Movement, a Functionalist might look at what macro-level needs the movement serves. For example, a Structural Functionalist might ask how the party forces people to pay attention to the economy.

The Conflict Perspective

The Conflict perspective is another macro-analytical view, one that focuses on the genesis and growth of inequality. A conflict theorist studying the Tea Party Movement might look at how business interests have manipulated the system over the last 30 years, leading to the gross inequality we see today. Or this perspective might explore how the massive redistribution of wealth from the middle class to the upper class could lead to a two-class system reminiscent of Marxist ideas.

The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

A third perspective is the Symbolic Interaction or Interactionist perspective. This method of analyzing groups takes a micro-level view. Instead of studying the big picture, these researchers look at the day-to-day interactions of groups. Studying these details, the Interactionist looks at issues like leadership style and group dynamics. In the case of the Tea Party Movement, Interactionists might ask, "How does the group dynamic in New York differ from that in Atlanta?" Or, "What dictates who becomes the

de facto leader in different cities—geography, social dynamics, economic circumstances?”

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Types of Groups

- Understand primary and secondary groups as the two sociological groups
- Recognize in-groups and out-groups as subtypes of primary and secondary groups
- Define reference groups

Defining a Group

The term **group** refers to any collection of two or more people who share some sense of togetherness and belongingness, or of a group consciousness. This tells us that just because people share the same physical space does not necessarily mean that they are a group. People who happen to, say, take the same subway train and who are strangers to each other are considered an **aggregate**, or a crowd. Another type of nongroup is a **category**, a collection of people who share similar characteristics but who are not tied to one another. Students who got more than 40 credits and whose GPA is higher than 3.50 can be considered a category, for example. So strictly saying, although even sociologists use the word a "racial group," if people belonging to a given race do not share a group consciousness, we'd better use the word a "racial category," instead.

People in a group don't have to be together oftentimes. If they share a particular interest or consciousness, and if they know it, then, they can be considered a group. People who fanatically support the NY Yankees at the Yankee Stadium, for example, are usually not together all other times, but they share the similar emotions at the stadium, and clearly know it. Hence, they are a group. Similarly, people who keep shaking their heads violently throughout a rock concert (or headbanging?) are a group, as well.

Interestingly, people within an aggregate or category can become a group. After a disastrous hurricane, for example, people in a middle-class (a category) neighborhood (an aggregate) who did not know each other may become friendly and help each other. Or children who happen to be in the same playground and who don't know each other are initially an aggregate. When an ice cream truck comes, playing that music loud, however, and

when they now enjoy licking the ice cream together and smile at each other, they may be a group.

Types of Groups

Sociologist Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929) offered the idea of **primary groups**, a "certain fusion of individualities in a common whole" (1909). In a word, it is a "we." Its members view this group and other members (e.g., close friends and family members) as *end* in themselves (or "goal") and valuable in their own right. In this group, in which its members' emotions are satisfied, "expressive ties" predominate.

On the other hand, "instrumental ties" predominate in **secondary groups**; we perceive this group as *means* (or "tool") rather than as *end* in its own right. Examples of this group include "workplace" and "school." The main purpose for workers to belong to a workplace is not the group or other workers, but something else, i.e., the wages! Likewise, the main purpose for students to attend a school is not the group or other students, but the degree and the certificate!

In the old type of societies, there was no clear cut between the two types of groups. Peasant family members, for example, worked together. Or school teachers acted as if they were their students' parents. Even in modern societies, on the other hand, members of secondary groups can develop some forms of primary groups. Workers become friends to each other, for example. Or professors observe--often enviously--some of their students getting into romantic relationships.



Engineering and construction students gather around a job site. How do your academic interests define your in- and out-groups? (Photo courtesy of USACEpublicaffairs/flickr)

In-Groups and Out-Groups

One of the ways that groups can be powerful is through inclusion, and its inverse, exclusion. The insiders in a we-group are in a relation of peace and "loyalty" to each other; their relation to all outsiders, of others-groups, is one of war and "antagonism." Sociologist William Sumner (1840–1910) offered the concepts of **in-group** and **out-group** to explain this social psychological phenomenon (Sumner 2002 [1907]).

When the hatred against, or the fear for, a given out-group (or "they") grows, the in-group ("we") solidarity can be heightened, in a clearly correlative relation. This means that when there's no "they," there's no "we." As "they" emerges, so does "we." When the Nazi Germany scapegoated Jewish citizens as "they," for example, most Germans suffering from the devastating consequences of the WWI defeat turned out to be a solid "we" and fervently supported the Nazis, the new hero to the "we." Once caught in this social psychological phenomenon, people's perception can be twisted

to such an extent that harming "they" is not just justified but comes to be viewed as heroic.

Watching our own society, we can easily find this "we"-"they" phenomenon. According to the New York Times (2019), for example, "However often President Trump strays from his favored political strategy, he faithfully returns to it like a dog to a bone: first, polarize the American electorate along racial, cultural and economic lines, then exploit the schisms that have supplanted the class divisions that were once central to both American and European partisan politics." For this new "hero" for America, to be more specific, Hispanics and Muslims are "they" to be scapegoated.

Summary

Groups largely define how we think of ourselves. There are two main types of groups: primary and secondary. As the names suggest, the primary group is the long-term, complex one. People use groups as standards of comparison to define themselves—both who they are and who they are not. Sometimes groups can be used to exclude people or as a tool that strengthens prejudice.

Further Research

For more information about cyberbullying causes and statistics, check out this website: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Cyberbullying>

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Glossary

aggregate

a collection of people who exist in the same place at the same time, but who don't interact or share a sense of identity

category

people who share similar characteristics but who are not connected in any way

expressive function

a group function that serves an emotional need

group

any collection of at least two people who interact with some frequency and who share some sense of aligned identity

in-group

a group a person belongs to and feels is an integral part of his identity

instrumental function

being oriented toward a task or goal

out-group

a group that an individual is not a member of, and may even compete with

primary groups

small, informal groups of people who are closest to us

reference groups

groups to which an individual compares herself

secondary groups

larger and more impersonal groups that are task-focused and time limited

Group Size and Structure

- How size influences group dynamics
- Different styles of leadership
- How conformity is impacted by groups



Cadets illustrate how strongly conformity can define groups.

(Photo courtesy David Spender/flickr)

Group Leadership

Often, larger groups require some kind of leadership. In small, primary groups, leadership tends to be informal. After all, most families don't take a vote on who will rule the group, nor do most groups of friends. This is not to say that *de facto* leaders don't emerge, but formal leadership is rare. In secondary groups, leadership is usually more overt and formal. There are often clearly outlined roles and responsibilities, with a chain of command to follow. Some secondary groups, like the military, have highly structured and clearly understood chains of command, and many lives depend on those. Other secondary groups, like a workplace or a classroom, also have formal leaders, but the styles and functions of leadership can vary significantly.

Leadership function refers to the main focus or goal of the leader. An **instrumental leader** is one who is goal-oriented and largely concerned with accomplishing set tasks. We can imagine that the army captain or the manager of professional sport teams would be an instrumental leader. In contrast, **expressive leaders** are more concerned with maintaining emotional health, and ensuring that people feel supported. Social and religious leaders—rabbis, priests, imams, directors of youth homes, and social service programs—are often perceived as expressive leaders.

Closely related to these leadership functions, there are three different leadership styles, namely, democratic leaders, laissez-faire leaders, and authoritarian leaders.

Leadership Style	The Power Balance Between the Group and Its Members	Example
Democratic	Group = Members	The U.S. government
Laissez-Faire	group < MEMBERS	Scholars' organizations
Authoritarian	GROUP > members	Sports teams, military

The Three Major Leadership Styles

In order to understand these different leadership styles, we should compare them in terms of "the power balance between the group and its members" (as shown above). Under **democratic leaders**, the power balance between them is (or has to be) even. The group cannot force its members to do something without their agreement. What's going on between them is, hence, negotiations all the time. An example of this leadership style is (or

should be) the U.S. government. The U.S. president (the top leader), indeed, cannot lead the nation, say, to a war without the support of the people, who are (should be) well represented by Senators and Representatives.

Under a **laissez-faire leader** (“leave it alone” in French), the group doesn't have power. It is a hands-off leadership, allowing its members to self-manage and make their own decisions. An example of this kind of leader might be scholars' organizations, such as the American Sociological Association. The organization has the leader, or the president, but he/she doesn't control its members' research topics or directions. The danger of this leadership is, to be noted, that although this style can work well with highly motivated and mature participants who themselves have clear goals and guidelines, if this style were implemented in, say, a kindergarten class, the situation would be chaotic, and parents would get mad.

Under an **authoritarian leader**, the group has the entire power, and its members are required to act for the sake of the group. The leader issues orders and assigns tasks to accomplish the group's goal. As aforementioned in the discussion about the "instrumental leader" above, the army captain and the manager of professional sport teams operate their jobs with this style. In order to win the games or wars, they lead their groups, and their members simply follow the leaders' decisions.

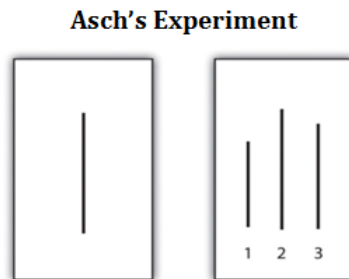
Although many students may believe that the democratic leadership is the best among other styles ever, it depends on the type and the purpose of the group. In the battle field, for example, long negotiations between the captain and the soldiers (i.e., democracy) may lead this group to a total annihilation. Likewise, if a kindergarten teacher let the children vote for what to eat for lunch, they may choose ice cream Monday through Friday, and this may lead them to terrible diarrhea.

Conformity

Psychologist Solomon Asch (1907–1996) conducted experiments that illustrated how great the pressure to conform is, specifically within a small group (1956). After reading about his work in the Sociological Research

feature, ask yourself what you would do in Asch's experiment. Would you speak up? What would help you speak up and what would discourage it?

Conformity Pressure



In 1951, psychologist Solomon Asch sat a small group of about eight people around a table. Only one of the people sitting there was the true subject; the rest were associates of the experimenter. However, the subject was led to believe that the others were all, like him, people brought in for an experiment in visual judgments.

The researcher shows two panels, one with a single vertical line, and the other with three vertical lines differing in length (as shown above), and asks: "Which of the three lines, 1, 2, or 3, is the closest in length to the line put on the left?"

The answer is easy--if we are by ourselves. When all other people make the same mistake, however, some of us (more than 1/3) follow that mistake, which we know is wrong, though. This is a social psychological phenomenon called **conformity pressure**.

Asch concluded that there are two main causes for conformity: people want to be liked by the group or they believe that the group is better informed than they are. He found his study results disturbing; they revealed that educated people tend to go along with a wrong answer (Asch 1956).

Assume that you are taking the subway train. At a given station, which is not your destination, almost all other passengers got off. What would you do?

Groupthink

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." Functional aspects of "groups" tend to be more emphasized than their dysfunctional ones. Having learned Asch's experiment, however, we can restate the above, like: "Alone we can make so little *error*; together we can make so much." Social psychologists found that conformity can lead to such disastrous phenomenon as **groupthink**, a narrowing of thought by a group of people, leading to the perception that there is only one correct answer, and that to even suggest alternatives is a sign of disloyalty (Janis 1982).

Groupthink involves the aforementioned "in-group" loyalty and "out-group" antagonism, and its energy is maintained through emerging, and growing, ethnocentrism (the self-centered attitude on the group level). Things are discussed exclusively for the in-group advantage, and, very importantly, basic human rights on the personal level (both in in-group and in out-group) are totally undermined. Furthermore, out-group people are dehumanized, that is, they are viewed as non-humans. Totalitarianism and dictatorship (as opposed to democracy) are possible when groupthink dominates the society. Discussions supporting the governmental spying on ordinary people for the sake of "war on terrorism" form a clear example. The slogan of "America first" (rather than "people first") is another.

Once involved in "groupthink" deeply, even a nice person can engage in inhumane activities--let alone government officials or medical professionals. After 9/11, for example, U.S. government officials (and many Americans) justified torture of prisoners at Guantanamo, as moral. Thought narrowed so greatly that the U.S. Justice Department ruled that the United States was not bound by the Geneva Convention that prohibits torture (Lewis 2005). Even medical professionals, originally trained to help people, joined in. They advised the CIA interrogators, telling them when to stop waterboarding, slamming prisoners' heads into walls, or shackling a prisoner's arms to the ceiling—so there wouldn't be permanent damage" (Shane 2009). And, again, many Americans support this.

Perhaps the key to preventing groupthink is the widest possible circulation—especially among a nation's top government officials—of research by social scientists independent of the government and information that media reporters have gathered freely (Henslin 2014, p. 154). Giving free rein to

diverse opinions based on scientific research may reduce chances for groupthink to dominate the society, or world.

Summary

Primary groups rarely have formal leaders although there can be informal leadership. In secondary groups, there are two types of leadership functions, with expressive leaders focused on emotional health and wellness, and instrumental leaders more focused on results. Closely related to them, there are three different leadership styles: democratic leaders, laissez-faire leaders, and authoritarian leaders.

A number of experiments have illustrated how strong the drive to conform can be. It is worth considering real-life examples of how conformity pressure and group-think can lead people to ethically and morally suspect acts.

Further Research

What is your leadership style? The website <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Leadership> offers a quiz to help you find out!

Explore other experiments on conformity at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Stanford-Prison>

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Glossary

authoritarian leader

a leader who issues orders and assigns tasks

conformity

the extent to which an individual complies with group or societal norms

democratic leader

a leader who encourages group participation and consensus-building before moving into action

dyad

a two-member group

expressive leader

a leader who is concerned with process and with ensuring everyone's emotional wellbeing

instrumental leader

a leader who is goal oriented with a primary focus on accomplishing tasks

laissez-faire leader

a hands-off leader who allows members of the group to make their own decisions

leadership function

the main focus or goal of a leader

leadership style

the style a leader uses to achieve goals or elicit action from group members

triad

a three-member group

Formal Organizations

- Understand the different types of formal organizations
- Recognize the characteristics of bureaucracies
- Identify the concepts of the McJob and the McDonaldization of society

Our contemporary societies are dominated by large and impersonal secondary organizations. From schools to businesses to healthcare to government, these organizations, referred to as **formal organizations**, are indeed **bureaucracies**, those operated upon secure sets of rules that govern people, rather than the other way around.

Types of Formal Organizations



Girl Scout troops and correctional facilities are both formal organizations. (Photo (a) courtesy of moonlightbulb/flickr; Photo (b) courtesy of CxOxS/flickr)

Sociologist Amitai Etzioni (1975) posited that formal organizations fall into three categories. **Normative organizations**, also called voluntary organizations, are based on shared interests. As the name suggests, joining them is voluntary and typically done because people find membership rewarding in an intangible way. The Audubon Society and a ski club are

examples of normative organizations. **Coercive organizations** are groups that we must be coerced, or pushed, to join. These may include prison or a rehabilitation center. Symbolic interactionist Erving Goffman states that most coercive organizations are total institutions (1961). A total institution is one in which inmates or military soldiers live a controlled lifestyle and in which total resocialization takes place. The third type is **utilitarian organizations**, which, as the name suggests, are joined because of the need for a specific material reward. High school and the workplace fall into this category—one joined in pursuit of a diploma, the other in order to make money.

	Normative	Coercive	Utilitarian
Benefit of Membership	Intangible benefit	Corrective benefit	Tangible benefit
Type of Membership	Volunteer basis	Required	Contractual basis
Feeling of Connectedness	Shared affinity	No affinity	Some affinity

Three Categories of Formal Organizations Courtesy of Etzioni (1975)

Bureaucracies

Max Weber offered an **ideal type** of bureaucracies, describing such characteristics as: hierarchy of authority, a clear division of labor, explicit rules, and impersonality (1968 [1922]). To make it sure, though, this "ideal" doesn't mean "best." It should be seen as a "pure" type, instead, through which to eliminate all noises in the reality (**contexts**) and to focus only on

essential aspects of the topic in discussion (**concepts**) (the difference between them will be discussed in Ch. 18, Work and Economy). So, although Weber's ideal type helps us understand the core principles of bureaucratic organizations (concepts), it can't be expected to explain, say, why so many sexual misconduct scandals can happen to so many high-ranked men, or anything like that (contexts).

Hierarchy of authority is one of the major principles of bureaucracy that places workers and offices vertically by their ranking of authority. Together with the next principle, division of labor, this helps clarify who is responsible to what. BMCC, our school, for example, is bureaucratically organized, at the top of which placed is the president. Below him/her, there are several departments, such as the natural science department, social science department, and so forth, at the top of each of which placed is the chairperson followed by the deputy chairs... Hence, things are organized in a chain of command shaped upon this hierarchy of authority.

The principle of **division of labor** divides the entire task of the organization into pieces, assigning each worker a specific role to play. Based on specialization of each role, this improves efficiency. For example, professors specialized in psychology teach psychology and nothing else, and they can't be expected, say, to process students' financial aid application, or to clean the bathrooms in the campus. Other than academic departments, there are several different offices in BMCC, such as the admissions office, registrar's office, office of human resources, and so forth, and workers in each office play their own specific roles and nothing else. The sum of all the roles played constitutes the entire task of this college, and that's what a "division of labor" is about.

The principle of **explicit rules** requires all rules that govern the organization to be written down and clearly shown to everybody. There should be no hidden rules. The syllabus of your sociology course is an example for this. In the end of each semester, some students ask, showing a full of tears in their eyes, "Professor, is there anything I can do to get a passing grade?" Sorry, but everything students need to know is printed in the syllabus, and there's no hidden rule. This principle helps maintain

equality for everybody in the same way. "Yo, you're leaving your eye-dropper bottle on my desk. Pick that up, okay?"

Finally, bureaucracies are also characterized by **impersonality**, which takes personal feelings out of professional situations. This principle protects organizations from various forms of corruption, such as nepotism, backroom deals, and other types of favoritism. Impersonality also requires that authority resides in the position or the office, and not in the person, and, on the other hand, that evaluation of a job reflects the quality of its performance, and not the person's race/ethnicity, gender, or the like. The professor, for example, is required to give a grade to his/her students as the professor, not as a friend to some particular students; likewise, the grade is expected to reflect students' performance only, not their personal qualities.

Criticisms of Bureaucracies

The bureaucratic arrangement for big organizations is thus functional in many ways, including clarification of responsibility, efficiency, fairness, and so on. On the other hand, however, there are several negatives. So-called **red tape** or "trained incapacity" is one of those. Bureaucrats are trained not to use their human sense but to follow rules in rigid manner. This can cause ridiculous situations. An ID card, for example, that shows one's date of birth may not be accepted just because it expired some time ago, although one's date of birth can't expire. Robert Merton (1957), hence, mockingly pointed out that adherence to the rules, originally conceived as means (or tool), becomes transformed into end (goal) in itself. That is, workers in big organizations tend to follow the rules *for the sake of the rules* rather than for the sake of the mission.

Related to the above, some critically observe that bureaucrats in general act like robots, each of which can be likened to "a single cog in an ever-moving mechanism which prescribes to him/her an essentially fixed route of march" (Mills and Gerth, 2007 [1958], p. 228). In other words, this ever-moving mechanism--or bureaucracy--is controlling humans, not the other way around, the condition that is called **alienation**.



This McDonald's storefront in Egypt shows the McDonaldization of society. (Photo courtesy of s_w_ellis/flickr)

McDonaldization

McDonaldization, a view offered by George Ritzer (1993), refers to the increasing presence of the fast food business model in common social institutions, as seen in 7-Eleven, Starbucks, Dunkin' Donuts, Pizza Hut, and, of course, McDonald's. Although it is based on Max Weber's ideas about the rationalization based on the bureaucracy, Ritzer's focus is placed on increasing cultural *homogeneity* in our globalized world. The merits of this business model includes: efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control. At McDonald's, for example (Ritzer 2011, pp. 584-86):

- Efficiency: Burgers are assembled in an assembly-line fashion. The drive-through window is a highly efficient means for customers to obtain, and for employees to dole out, meals.
- Predictability: Customers can order, pay, and leave quickly.
- Calculability: Customers spend as little time as possible in the restaurant. The drive-through window reduces this time to zero.
- Control: Employees are clearly controlled by such technologies as french-fry machines that ring when the fries are done and even automatically lift the fries out of the hot oil.

Although having grown globally in our contemporary world as a good business model with a lot of merits, it should be also pointed out that McDonaldization is not free from demerit aspects, which Ritzer (ibid.) calls "irrationality of rationality." In order to lower the cost, for example, McDonald's serves its customers in a one-size-fits-all pattern, disregarding personal tastes of each customer. Similarly, through the fast job, customers cannot expect high-quality food. Moreover, in its automated business mechanism, in which not just employees but customers are also treated as its parts, person-to-person interactions cannot be expected. In short, Ritzer argues (ibid.), McDonaldization is a source of dehumanization and degradation for employees and customers alike. Keeping these in mind, compare giant fast-food chain restaurants with small neighborhood restaurants, such as that run by, say, David helped by his wife, Jane, and by his son, Andres...

Summary

Large organizations fall into three main categories: normative/voluntary, coercive, and utilitarian. We live in a time of contradiction: while the pace of change and technology are requiring people to be more nimble and less bureaucratic in their thinking, large bureaucracies like hospitals, schools, and governments are more hampered than ever by their organizational format. At the same time, the past few decades have seen the development of a trend to bureaucratize and conventionalize local institutions. Increasingly, Main Streets across the country resemble each other; instead of a Bob's Coffee Shop and Jane's Hair Salon there is a Dunkin Donuts and a Supercuts. This trend has been referred to as the McDonaldization of society.

Further Research

As mentioned above, the concept of McDonaldization is a growing one. The following link discusses this phenomenon further:
<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/McDonaldization>

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Glossary

bureaucracies

formal organizations characterized by a hierarchy of authority, a clear division of labor, explicit rules, and impersonality.

clear division of labor

the fact that each individual in a bureaucracy has a specialized task to perform

coercive organizations

organizations that people do not voluntarily join, such as prison or a mental hospital

explicit rules

the types of rules in a bureaucracy; rules that are outlined, recorded, and standardized

formal organizations

large, impersonal organizations

hierarchy of authority

a clear chain of command found in a bureaucracy

impersonality

the removal of personal feelings from a professional situation

Iron Rule of Oligarchy

the theory that an organization is ruled by a few elites rather than through collaboration

McDonaldization of Society

the increasing presence of the fast food business model in common social institutions

meritocracy

a bureaucracy where membership and advancement is based on merit—proven and documented skills

normative or voluntary organizations

organizations that people join to pursue shared interests or because they provide some intangible rewards

total institution

an organization in which participants live a controlled lifestyle and in which total resocialization occurs

utilitarian organizations

organizations that are joined to fill a specific material need